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March 2009

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NO APOLOGIES for making Barcelona our cover story this month. They are, without doubt, the team of the moment, breaking records as they sweep all before them in both their domestic league and the Champions League.

In his wide-ranging report, starting on page 36, Spain correspondent Sid Lowe concentrates on Barcelona's free-scoring form in La Liga, where they are on course to beat Real Madrid's total of 107 goals, set during the 1989-90 season. But we should not forget Barca's record in this season's Champions League group stage, where they finished as top scorers, twice putting five goals past their opponents.

Unfortunately for Barca, the form team from the group stage rarely ends up as the champions of Europe the following May. The knockout rounds have made a habit of rewarding teams who err on the side of caution, though Manchester United were a notable exception last year.

The nature of the competition, switching from league to cup format, makes it hard to predict a winner. The heart says Barca and coach Pep Guardiola deserve success for their positive, attacking approach. The head says a more pragmatic team may get the better of them.

Either way, I hope you find our match-by-match guide to the first knockout round, starting on page 46, useful.

Enjoy the issue.

GAVIN HAMILTON, Editor
gavin_hamilton@ipcmedia.com

COVER STORY

BARCELONA

36 Camp Nou revolution
In the space of six months, new coach Pep Guardiola has transformed Barcelona from a squad of underperformers into Europe's most exciting team. Sid Lowe reports

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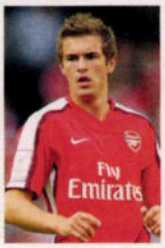

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SEE OUR SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTIONS OFFER ON PAGE 26

12 stories you need to know about

Cashing in...Given joined City from Newcastle

Best in the world...it's Ronaldo again

1 It's a clean sweep for Cristiano

Cristiano Ronaldo completed his domination of 2008's individual player awards when he was crowned FIFA World Player of the Year in Zurich. The Manchester United star finished comfortably ahead of Lionel Messi, Fernando Torres, Xavi and Kaka in the annual poll of national coaches and captains.

2 Barca are favourites as the Champions League knockout stages kick off

Pep Guardiola's Barcelona side, who are in imperious form in La Liga, were the bookies' tip to reach the 2009 Champions League Final as the competition switched to a knockout format. More, page 36. Match previews, page 46.

Good bet...Barca

3 City lead the spending spree

Manchester City were the biggest spenders in the transfer window, despite failing in their efforts to persuade Kaka to leave Milan for what would have been a world-record transfer fee. City still managed to spend a fortune, investing £45million on Wayne Bridge, Craig Bellamy, Shay Given and Nigel De Jong.

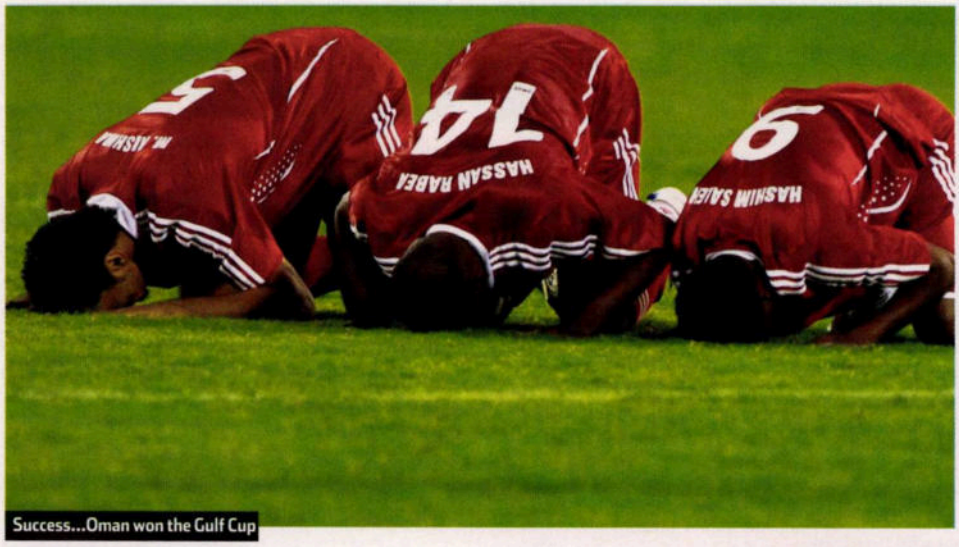
Real target...Kaka

4 Kaka to Madrid?

The resignation of Ramon Calderon as Real Madrid president has heightened speculation in Spain that Florentino Perez will launch a bid to be re-elected to the club's top position this summer. By not issuing a public denial, Perez appeared happy to fuel rumours that the signing of Kaka from Milan would form the central platform of an election campaign.

5 Oman win Gulf Cup

Oman finally shook off their tag as the nearly men of Middle Eastern football and defeated Saudi Arabia in a penalty shoot-out to win the Gulf Cup. More, page 99.


Success...Oman won the Gulf Cup

8 2018 and 2022 World Cup bids

FIFA president Sepp Blatter said it was "remarkable" that there had been 11 different "expressions of interest" in hosting the 2018 and 2022 World Cup. Those interested are, in alphabetical order, Australia, Belgium/Holland, England, Indonesia, Japan, Korea Republic, Mexico, Qatar, Russia, Spain/Portugal and the USA. However, in a blow for Belgium/Holland and Spain/Portugal, Blatter appeared to rule out joint candidacies. Blatter was speaking in Asuncion, Paraguay, where he was attending the congress of the South American confederation, CONMEBOL. He said: "As long as we have single-country bids which provide all the necessary guarantees we will reject co-hosting bids." Blatter's comments established England as the favourites to win the 2018 bid, with the United States the early favourites for 2022.

World Cup hopefuls...Spain and Portugal announced a joint bid

6 Bin Hammam under pressure in Asia

The president of the Asian Football Confederation, Mohamed Bin Hammam, is facing a challenge to his leadership from the Bahrain FA chief, Sheikh Salman Ebrahim Al Khalifa. Bin Hammam's popularity has been called into question after his decision to relocate AFC headquarters away from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia – its base for 43 years. He has moved to protect his position by asking the AFC congress to approve new rules that would prevent Al Khalifa, who is not a member of the AFC executive committee, from standing. "Both the changes are designed to keep him in power. It is an attempt to consolidate his position as a dictator. But there is already a strong movement to dispose of the Qatari," said Peter Velappen, the former AFC general secretary.

7 Wembley gets 2011 Champions League Final

Wembley is to open its doors in 2011 to Europe's top international club duel for the first time in 19 years – since Barcelona beat Sampdoria in 1992 with a goal in extra time from Ronald Koeman. UEFA's executive decided to put an end to Wembley's waiting after earlier delays in the award because of building overruns and tax issues. Meanwhile, the Republic of Ireland will host its first major European club Final with Dublin's Lansdowne Road named as the venue for the 2011 Final of the Europa League (the rebranded version of the UEFA Cup). The 2012 Champions League Final will be staged at Munich's Allianz Arena, while Bucharest's National Stadium hosts the Europa League Final. However, Wembley's win was Arsenal's loss. The Emirates Stadium had been up against Lansdowne Road in a bid to stage the Europa League Final, but rules stipulate that one nation cannot stage both UEFA finals in the same year.

Under pressure...Bin Hammam

Champions League venue...Wembley

Happier times...Lebanon's national team

9 King's Cup match

Thailand's King's Cup match against Lebanon descended into chaos when the Middle East side twice walked off the pitch in protest at foul play that prompted two on-field brawls.

10 Libertadores Cup begins

The group stages of South America's leading club competition get under way this month. Preview, page 94.

Preliminaries...Libertadores Cup action

Banned...Mannini (left) and Possanzini

11 WADA are under fire for banning two Italians who were late for drugs test

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) faced criticism after it pushed for tougher punishments for two Italian players who turned up late for their post-match drugs tests. Daniele Mannini and Davide Possanzini have now both been banned for a year for being half an hour late for drugs testing after playing for Brescia in a Serie B game against Chievo in December 2007. The pair were suspended for 15 days in March 2008 by an Italian Olympic Committee judge, but WADA appealed the decision and asked for tougher sentences. Mannini, 25, left Brescia and joined Serie A side Napoli in January 2008.

12 Madrid milestone for Raul

Real Madrid's captain was on course to set a new club record after he equalled Alfredo Di Stefano's total of 307 goals for the club when he scored against Numancia.

Record breaker...Raul needs just one more goal

7 questions we need answers to

Spurred on...Keane

1 WHY WERE ARSENAL ALLOWED TO SIGN ANDREI ARSHAVIN EVEN AFTER THE TRANSFER DEADLINE?

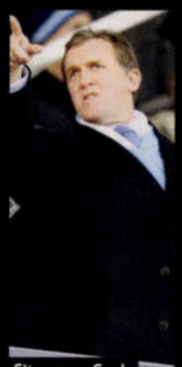
No reasonable explanation has yet been given for why the Russian's transfer went through even though Arsenal missed the 5pm deadline on February 2.

2 WILL ROBBIE KEANE BE REMEMBERED AS RAFA BENITEZ'S GREATEST FOLLY?

The Republic of Ireland striker returned to Tottenham six months after being hailed as the final piece in the Anfield jigsaw.

3 HAS GARRY COOK BURNED HIS BRIDGES WITH MILAN?

The Manchester City executive chairman attracted widespread ridicule for his dealings over the Kaka transfer. More, page 28.


City man...Cook

4 CAN YOANN GOURCUFF COPE WITH BEING LABELLED THE NEW ZIDANE?

The French midfielder, on loan at Bordeaux from Milan, is attracting rave reviews. More, page 18.

Rising star...Gourcuff

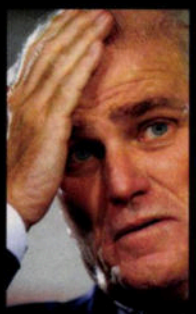
6 WILL MAJOR LEAGUE SOCCER BE BETTER OFF WITHOUT DAVID BECKHAM?

The former England captain, currently on loan at Milan, was edging closer to turning his back on the game in the United States.

Decision time...Beckham

Latecomer...Arshavin

5 WILL RAMON CALDERON BE REMEMBERED AS THE WORST REAL MADRID PRESIDENT EVER?


Out...Calderon

There will be fresh presidential elections at the Bernabeu this summer after Calderon was forced to quit following newspaper revelations of vote-rigging. More, page 16.

Crock...Ibisevic

7 HAVE THE TITLE DREAMS OF HOFFENHEIM BEEN RUINED BY INJURY?

The surprise Bundesliga leaders suffered a major blow during the winter break when leading scorer Vedad Ibisevic suffered a serious knee injury during a friendly game. More, page 85.

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18 people on the move

Who's gone where

1 JAVIER AGUIRRE

The Mexican was sacked as coach of Atletico Madrid after his team failed to win a single game under his leadership in 2009. He was replaced by former Atletico goalkeeper Abel Resino, who had been in charge of second division Castellon.

Shown the door...Aguirre

2 HUGO RODALLEGA

The Colombia striker completed a £4.5million move to Wigan Athletic from Mexico's Necaxa.

3 NIGEL DE JONG

The Holland international midfielder left Hamburg for Manchester City in a transfer that cost City around £17m. It was later revealed that the 24-year-old had a release clause in his contract that would have allowed him to go for £2.3m in the summer.

Couldn't wait...De Jong

4 RICARDO QUARESMA

The Portugal winger joined Chelsea on loan until the end of the season. He left Internazionale with coach Jose Mourinho suggesting his £16m summer signing from Porto had been instigated by Inter president Massimo Moratti.

New challenge...Fowler

5 ROBBIE FOWLER

The 33-year-old former England and Liverpool striker, who was released by Blackburn Rovers in December, joined Australian A-League newcomers North Queensland Fury.

Wigan new boy...Rodallega

6 MARCO MOTTA
Roma signed the Italy Under-21 captain on loan from Udinese until the end of the season, with an option

On loan...Motta

to sign the right-sided player on a permanent basis in the summer for £6.2m.

7 CHARLES N'ZOGBIA
The Frenchman left Newcastle and joined Wigan after claiming coach Joe Kinnear had insulted him by forgetting his name in a television interview, calling him "Insomnia".

8 ROBBIE KEANE
The Republic of Ireland international left Liverpool after six months and returned to Tottenham, whose last game of the season is at Anfield. He will still get a championship medal if the Reds win the Premier League.

9 CHO CHUNG-YUN
The former coach replaced long-time president Chung Mong-joon as head of the South Korean FA. Cho, 63, had recently been vice-president.

10 PABLO OSVALDO
Bologna signed the Argentina-born Italy Under-21 striker from Fiorentina for £6.2m.

Real shock...Faubert

11 JULIEN FAUBERT
The French midfielder joined Real Madrid on loan from West Ham United for the rest of the season.

12 NIKOLA ZIGIC
The Serbian striker returned to former club Racing Santander on loan from Valencia until the end of this season.

13 TONI KROOS
Germany's Under-20 midfielder joined Bayer Leverkusen on loan from Bayern Munich until the end of next season.

R.I.P.
ALBINO FRIACA CARDOSO, universally known as Friaca, died aged 84. Best known for scoring Brazil's only goal in the final game of the 1950 World Cup, which the hosts lost 2-1 to Uruguay in the Maracana stadium, Friaca began his career in 1943 with Rio club Vasco da Gama. Fast and versatile, he switched to Sao Paulo after six years before later moving on to Ponte Preta. He ended his playing career in 1958.

REPORTS
WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

1 PEOPLE ON THE PITCH...
Dinamo Zagreb are said to be pleased that they have loaned Dino Drpic to German side Karlsruhe. The defender, whose off-the-field behaviour and gambling debts led to him being transfer listed, brought further controversy to the club when his wife, Playboy model Nives Celsius, told a Serbian TV station how they had sex on the pitch at Dinamo's Maksimir Stadium.

2 FAN POWER
Napoli supporters returned a £25,000 Rolex watch to Slovakian starlet Marek Hamsik after it was stolen from him in December during a robbery in Fuorigrotta.

3 BLAME DIEGO
Argentina manager Diego Maradona set off a fire alarm at a hotel in Manchester at 7am by puffing on a Havana cigar. The alert led to 200 guests being evacuated, among them the Chelsea squad ahead of their game at Old Trafford. The restless Blues lost 3-0 to Manchester United that afternoon.

4 VIEW OF THE FUTURE
After *World Soccer*'s look into the future last month, it has been reported that from next season fans inside Arsenal's Emirates Stadium will be able to watch replays of goals via a Sony PlayStation portable (PSP).

14 MARIO KIREV
Juventus signed the promising young keeper from Slavia Sofia, then loaned him to Swiss side Grasshopper until the end of the season.

Hot seat...Stoilov

15 ROBERTO ABBONDANZIERI
The Argentina goalkeeper rejoined Boca Juniors from Getafe.

16 STANIMIR STOILOV
The Litex Lovech boss was named as the new national coach of Bulgaria.

17 SEBASTIAN ABREU
The Uruguay striker joined Real Sociedad on loan from River Plate. Sociedad are his 16th club in 13 years.

18 NERY CARDOZO
The Argentina midfielder left Boca Juniors for Mexico's Jaguares, but the Buenos Aires club threatened legal action, claiming Cardozo had six months remaining on his contract.

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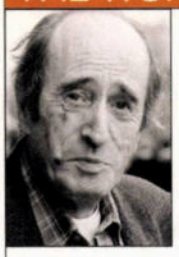

Brian Glanville

...on Manchester City's tiresome chief executive...Jimmy Bullard's perplexing move to Hull...Swansea's creditable Cup run...and continuing questions about Chelsea

THAT man with such abundant egg on his face? Could it be the ever-garrulous Garry Cook, chief executive of Manchester City, an Englishman schooled in the USA in corporate gobbledegook, learned at the knee of Nike, and humiliated like his plutocratic club by the Kaka fiasco?

How quick the egregious Cook, not so long ago a defender of the indefensible Thaksin Shinawatra, was to put the blame on Milan, to accuse them, coarsely, of "bottling" the deal, and Kaka's father of being "unsophisticated" in his dealings over image rights.

Milan would have plainly been all too happy to sell Kaka, for purely or impurely financial reasons. It was Kaka himself who ultimately said he would stay. When Silvio Berlusconi, resigned to the fact Kaka would indeed stay, put an arm round him, it was a gesture as meaningless as it could have been misleading. Now City have shelled out £29million all told for Craig Bellamy and Nigel De Jong.

Bellamy denies that he threatened to strike at West Ham before he left, and Gianfranco Zola has insisted that he had permission to miss what would have been his last game at Upton Park. Clearly we must believe both of them and banish from our brains those stories that, a couple of days before that West Ham game, Bellamy simply walked out of the training ground.

He is in fact a player for whom I have long had high respect. What wonderful games one has seen him play for Wales! What pace, what skill, what penetration! Yet at club level, and Lord knows there have been enough of them, his scoring record is strangely sparse and he has been sadly prone to injury and drama. He says how happy he is to be reunited with Mark Hughes, who managed him at Blackburn, so we shall see.

As for Robinho, colossally expensive and highly talented, one hopes he will emerge unscathed from his recent vicissitudes.

THE transfer of Jimmy Bullard from Fulham to Hull City still leaves me perplexed. Why, with his England pretensions, would he want to join so modest a club, for all its belated, romantic ascent to the top division? Why did Fulham feel they could let him go?

There are those who believe that Bullard was – to put it politely – unsettled when he suddenly found himself in an England squad, although he didn't play. Though he denies it, the bone of contention seems on the face of it to be that he wanted a contract which still had 18 months to run to be extended to four years, and a hefty rise in salary.

The old guard...Cook (left) and Thaksin

> "Hull will, like Fulham, essentially be engaged in seeking survival"

Roy Hodgson, his manager, and one I have known and admired for many years wouldn't budge, as legally he was quite entitled not to. Legally yes, but in terms of his team, could he afford to lose what was surely his best and most inspirational player?

Paired in central midfield with Danny Murphy, the way they dominated the Arsenal equivalent at Craven Cottage earlier this season was memorably impressive; and Fulham won. Bullard, who after all drew a full salary from Fulham during the five months when he was injured, was perpetual motion, always eager to break into attack, capable of scoring goals. The word is that for some time he and Hodgson had not seen eye to eye, but if that was always the criterion for players leaving their clubs, how many would stay in place? And was there no room for compromise?

Whistling, it seems, to keep his spirits up, Bullard, on the day he was presented to the Hull crowd before the match against Millwall, announced, emphatically, that Hull were the biggest club he had yet to play for: "The fan base is awesome up here. It's an up and coming club. I want to make this a good established club in the Premier League and, who knows [who indeed?], push for Europe."

No disrespect to Hull and their admirably resourceful manager, Phil Brown, who had the courage and the initiative radically to rebuild the team which gained promotion in that Wembley play-off, knowing it could never survive in the top echelon, but Hull, for all the occasional surprises they have sprung this season, will, like Fulham, essentially be engaged in seeking survival.

Bullard will as surely strengthen them as he has weakened Fulham, but I am still surprised.

ALL credit to Swansea City and their Spanish manager Roberto Martinez for their recent splendid achievements.

Yet I confess to a certain twinge of nostalgia for the Swansea Town that once was.

True, they do have a number of young Welshmen, some Swansea born, on their books, and in Joe Allen from Carmarthen, a midfielder not yet quite 19, they appear to have another star in the making. Yet the stars of the show at Portsmouth and elsewhere have come from faraway places, shrewdly picked

A new direction...Bullard cost Hull £5million

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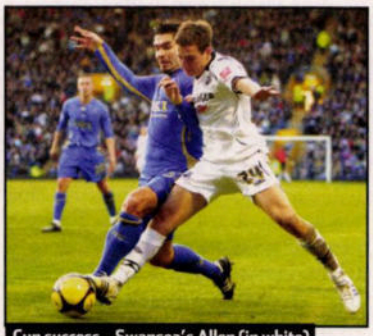
up by Martinez. Not least the stalwart striker Jason Scotland, from Trinidad. Then there are the various Latins: Jordi Gomez, Gorka Pintado, Albert Serran, Andrea Orlandi.

Why does my mind go back all those many years to a 1950 FA Cup tie at Highbury, when Swansea Town, as they then still were, put up such a brave show against an Arsenal team destined to win the Cup without ever playing outside London?

The electric winger Terry Medwin, destined later for Spurs; Roy Paul, a peerless wing-half who would later captain Manchester City to victory in the 1956 FA Cup; Ivor Allchurch perhaps the best Welsh inside-forward there has been. No John Charles, though. Swansea born and bred, he had been snatched away by Leeds. But his brother Mel would start at Swansea Town and become arguably the best


Cup success...Swansea's Allen (in white)

centre-half in the 1958 Swedish World Cup, while his own son, Jeremy, would be a Wales international.

WHAT, if anything, is going to happen to Chelsea? It is rumoured that billionaire owner Roman Abramovich lost a cool £14bn in the Russian credit debacle – mitigated, perhaps, by a story that he has commissioned yet another yacht for a mere £200m.

Chelsea have denied a consortium of Abu Dhabi and German Croesuses are planning a bid for the club – the figure of £800m has been mentioned, which would comfortably cover even the fortune a possibly disenchanted Abramovich has spent on the club.

Certainly there has been little to inspire him this season: an Old Trafford rout, plus a Southend Cup shock and a late victory against modest Stoke, both at Stamford Bridge.

There have been economies, not only in the transfer market. But the suggestion that the young millionaires pay for their own meals at Cobham surely does appear a bridge, if not Stamford Bridge, too far.

FIVE GOALS

WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN...

Spectacular...Baptista

1 Lionel Messi, Barcelona v Atletico Madrid
First of a hat-trick, a well-taken shot after a backheeled assist from Dani Alves

Class act...Messi

2 Yoann Gourcuff, Bordeaux v PSG
Astonishing turn past two defenders and fierce shot

Talent...Gourcuff

3 Gonzalo Colsa, Racing Santander v Valencia
Amazing own goal

4 Julio Baptista, Roma v Torino
Great overhead volley

5 Nene, Nacional v Sporting Lisbon
Dipping volley from 30 yards

To see clips of these goals, visit www.worldsoccer.com

Paul Gardner

...on what football can learn from Charles Darwin

A COUPLE of Charles Darwin anniversaries come around this year: he was born 200 years ago, and the extraordinary *On the Origin of Species* was published 150 years ago. Among the many things that make that book remarkable is the fact that it did *not* include the phrase "survival of the fittest". That was first used by philosopher Herbert Spencer some years later, and Darwin, with some reluctance, finally included it in the fifth edition of *Origin* in 1869.

It is a phrase that has caused a lot of problems, and it continues to do so. The objections range from the political (nothing but a justification for raw capitalism) to dismissing it as a phrase that actually means survival of those best equipped to survive, a tautology.

But the phrase does seem to have a special relevance to competitive sports. Admittedly, its original meaning has to be distorted, but that word "fittest" absolutely invites an interpretation based on physical strength. Or at least on physical fitness.

And so to Darwin and football. Is it the physically fit who survive in football, which must mean, are they the ones who win? I am quite certain that there is a sizeable school of thought that believes exactly that. With considerable reason, let it be said. Can there be any doubt that the modern game is, at least, as much a test of stamina, strength and speed as of skill?

Better prepared

Of course modern players are better prepared than those of past years, more scientifically trained, more scientifically fed, all of them living a much healthier life.

Not that long ago, in that superb Brazilian 1970 World Cup-winning team, there was a key midfielder, Gerson. A player who was once photographed smoking on the bench, who did not look to be in particularly good shape, who never seemed to do anything strenuous on the field – like running fast – a player who, in fact, seemed to spend chunks of each game in hibernation. But Gerson had a superb football brain. He would burst into magnificent life when it mattered and would win a game for you with a wonderful pass, short or long, or with a goal from a rasping left-foot shot.

No modern-day model...Gerson (centre) preferred brain over brawn

It's safe to say that there are no Gersons in the modern game, not at the top level. No coach today would put up with the way Gerson disappeared between his spells of genius. Watch tapes of games from the 1970s and the thing that strikes home at once is that they look so slow.

Today's football is primarily about speed. Everything has to be done quickly, immediately. Time is at a premium. As speed means fitness, in the physical sense, then, yes, our sport does subscribe to the survival of the fittest doctrine in its crudest sense. Because physical fitness is always the least subtle, the least difficult, and – to me, anyway – the most boring of all the football attributes.

Along with speed come strength and stamina, both very much part of the fitness menu. The devotion to fitness is even used as a sort of assurance that a coach is doing his job. Whenever he is fired, you can be sure his replacement will make a show of longer and tougher training sessions. Nothing to do with skill, just fitness. Approving quotes will issue forth from the players as they acknowledge that increased fitness is the way to go.

So the mania for fitness thrusts blindly on. Blindly, because sooner or later it must hit a wall. Obviously there are built-in limits to speed, size and strength. Football will soon reach those limits and as far as speed is concerned, I would argue it has already done so.

The problem with the physical version of fitness, as applied to football, is that it leaves little room for skill. In a truer definition of the phrase, the word fitness means simply the possession of any qualities that ensure survival, whatever they may be. Such a definition, applied to football, leaves plenty of room for skill to contribute to survival, i.e. winning.

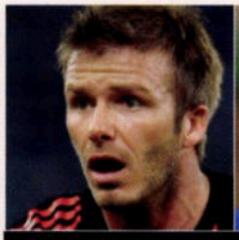
Darwin was not known for an interest in sports. I'm aware of one direct reference of his, when he referred to the scoring system in tennis as "idiotic". I feel quite certain he would offer the same opinion were he around now to comment on the way physical fitness, in its various forms, is being allowed to dominate football.

"The problem with the physical version of fitness, as applied to football, is that it leaves very little room for skill"

ESM Team of the Month

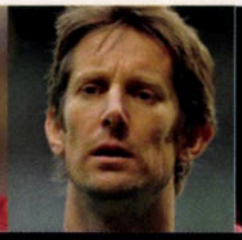
European Sports Magazines

JANUARY 2009

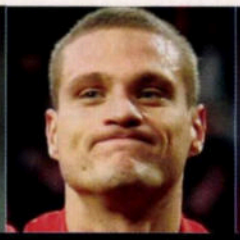


David Beckham
Milan
Votes ●●●
Boosted his chances of a 108th England cap by quickly adapting to Serie A, creating and scoring goals while charming the Milanese public.

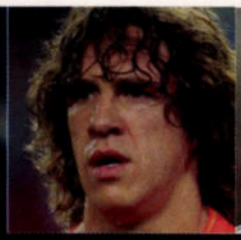
Daniel Alves
Barcelona
Votes ●●●●
The full-back has been a vibrant force on Barca's right flank, attacking with devastating effect and defending with dynamism and energy.



Edwin Van der Sar
Manchester United
Votes ●●●●●●●●
The 38-year-old showed he still has much to offer, setting a Premier League record of going 12 games without conceding a goal.

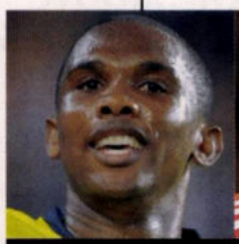


Nemanja Vidic
Manchester United
Votes ●●●●●●
The Serbia centre-back has been an outstanding presence at the back for the Premiership leaders and a huge aerial threat at set pieces.



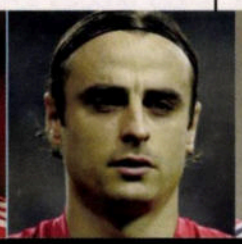
Carles Puyol
Barcelona
Votes ●●●●
Captain of Barca as their star soared high in La Liga, setting records and delighting fans everywhere with their attacking play.

Arjen Robben
Real Madrid
Votes ●●●●
One of the stars of the Madrid revival under Juande Ramos. The Dutch wide man has returned from injury in top form.

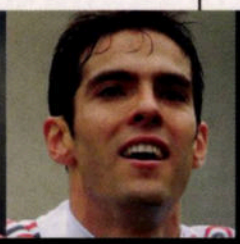


Samuel Eto'o
Barcelona
Votes ●●●
The Cameroon striker has benefitted from the confidence searing through Barcelona at the moment. The club are thankful he didn't leave in the summer.

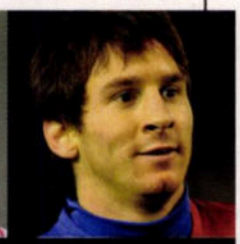
Steven Gerrard
Liverpool
Votes ●●●●●
As ever, a central figure for Liverpool, scoring crucial goals and leading by example in his team's quest for a first league title in 19 years.



Dimitar Berbatov
Manchester United
Votes ●●●●
The Bulgarian forward responded to early-season criticism with some sparkling performances for United.



Kaka
Milan
Votes ●●●
The Brazilian put aside the distraction of a possible world-record move to Manchester City to play his part in Milan's move up the table.



Lionel Messi
Barcelona
Votes ●●●●●●●●
With some mesmerizing performances for Barca, the young Argentinian is easily the world's best player at the moment. Cristiano who?

HOW IT WORKS

Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Magazines group vote for their first XI from Europe's top leagues. The players with the most votes make the overall team. For details of how ESM members voted this month, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

Keir Radnedge

...on how EU law still rules in football...Laurent Blanc...and the bidding process for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups

SO FAREWELL THEN, another transfer window. Some managers welcome it, some revile it. But Eurocrats in Brussels love it because it underlines the reality of how European Union law dictates to football not only in Europe but throughout the world.

The point was made once more when a delegation from the Olympic movement met Jan Figel, the European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth at the IOC headquarters in Lausanne – surely one of the most out-of-the-way towns to play headquarters to any significant sports federation. (No Lausanne club has won a Swiss football league title, for example, since 1965).

FIFA president Sepp Blatter was in the IOC delegation; it must have been a strange experience for him to be one of the supporting cast while IOC president Jacques Rogge took the lead.

Never mind. Blatter paid full attention and reported later: "I was very happy with the spirit of dialogue adopted by the representatives of the European Commission and commissioner Figel. I was also pleased to witness, once again, the unity of the Olympic and sporting movement, as demonstrated by today's strong delegation."

Predictable issues

The IOC also issued a statement after the meeting describing the issues up for discussion which included, predictably: the specificity and autonomy of sport, the financing of sport and betting, the application of EU competition law and of free movement principles in the field of sport, and the fight against doping.

So much for the agenda. Pretty obvious.

Breakthroughs? Absolute silence.

For one simple reason: despite all the platitudes which flow freely during such largely futile meetings the truth is that the European Union will never allow football in particular or sport in general any loopholes to step beyond European law – above all where freedom of movement of labour is concerned.

Same lines...UEFA president Platini and European Commissioner Figel

The present transfer system is a product of a compromise between FIFA and the EU after the Bosman verdict. The EU is not enamoured of any system whereby one employee can be sold, slave-like, from one company to another.

It accepts the status quo in sport only while footballers are guaranteed the right to walk out of a club on completion of a contract of employment.

The original deal was negotiated largely by FIFA which then imposed the transfer window on the world, partly because most money in the international transfer system is European – even though it is spent on players from Africa, Asia and the Americas.

Chuck Blazer, general secretary of CONCACAF and a member of the FIFA executive, is unhappy to have Europe (and the EU) dictating to the rest of the world. But then, he does not run a club which can earn its annual budget by selling a starry-eyed teenager to Europe.

Platini dissent

Michel Platini, UEFA's president, is another dissenting voice – surprisingly, maybe – who is edging gradually out of FIFA's corner.

FIFA and the IOC apparently feel that if they push long enough at the EU door, the Eurocrats will grow bored and give them their ball back. But it has dawned even on Platini, revisionist that he is, that football must work, like it or loathe it, within the parameter of European law.

Thus he has distanced UEFA, to Blatter's irritation, from the 6+5 concept of home and foreign players on the pitch; Platini prefers UEFA's more subtle insistence on a specified number of home-grown players in a squad. (Of course, it is only a matter of time before that is challenged in the European Court as a discriminatory practice).

Thus, while FIFA railed for years against the idea that clubs should be paid compensation for national team call-ups, UEFA went ahead with such a scheme at Euro 2008 last summer.

The historical reasons – Oulmers etc – do not need repeating. Suffice

"The European Union will never allow football any loopholes to step beyond its law...above all where freedom of movement is concerned"

when UEFA conceded the principle at the European Championship finals in Austria and Switzerland, Platini described the payouts as "testament to the new harmony in European football, and the willingness of associations and clubs to co-operate for the good of the game".

Sums were calculated on a basis of £3,420 per player per day but also taking into account qualifying appearances. This averaged out at £106,000 per player at the finals. Thus German clubs (£6.05million) were top earners followed by Spain (£4.55m) and England (£4.14m for 39 players).

Top-paid clubs were Germany's Werder Bremen (£935,1070), Lyon (£888,412), Bayern Munich (£870,452), Real Madrid (£822,559) and Barcelona (£816,573). The top-grossing English Premier League club were Arsenal, seventh overall with £732,760.

Thus, whatever FIFA (and the IOC) may want in terms of freedom within their own kingdoms, it is the clubs which rule and European law which empowers them. Expect a lot more high-level conferences, a lot more platitudes...and a lot more empty assertions.

FIFA has signalled the kick-off in the most complex World Cup bidding process ever – for both the 2018 and 2022 finals tournaments.

England, Australia, Belgium and Holland, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Portugal and Spain, Qatar, Russia, South Korea, and the United States will all compete, albeit in the knowledge that these World Cups must go to different continents. Thus if, as expected, a European nation wins host rights to 2018, no European bid will be considered for 2022.

The process will take 24 months and bidding is open to 145 national associations (none from Africa or South America) for 2018 and to 198 (none from South America) for 2022.

This will give both an unprecedentedly longer time than before for nations to prepare for hosting. Until now, the host has been decided "only" six years in advance.

In a letter to all its 200-plus member associations FIFA pointed out that the World Cup "has the unequivocal power to wake emotions and unite people worldwide... and that this overwhelming ability to reach out to the world should benefit the game of football itself and society in general".

Joint bid...Spain's Villar and Portugal's Madail

Potential candidates are asked to ensure that "this power is used in order to achieve positive change, in line with FIFA's philosophy: For the Game. For the World".

FIFA requests 12 venues with 40,000-minimum capacities for group games and 80,000 for opening game and Final.

The bidding timetable is as follows: March 16 for submission of bid registration form; December 11 for submission of signed bidding agreement; then May 14, 2010, for submission of the bid book.

England and the rest will learn their fate from the FIFA executive in December 2010.

LAURENT BLANC'S flourishing start to a managerial career has been underlined by a contract extension at Bordeaux. His success is also evidence of the way football management can turn into obsession.

Blanc, a key member of the France squad who won the 1998 World Cup and 2000 European Championship, took over *Les Girondins* in the summer of 2007. Bordeaux finished runners-up last season to Lyon and are threatening to end the champions' seven-year dominance of the League.

Blanc had no previous managerial experience but did study the theory at a French federation course for which one of the guest lecturers was Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger. So mind-blowing did Blanc find his description of the 24/7 life of a Premier League manager he vowed never to follow his mentor's path. Seems, though, the bug is catching.

Bitten by the bug...Blanc

HEADLINERS

People in the news...on and off the pitch

Ramon Calderon
Humiliating exit for Real Madrid president

SPAIN

FROM THE FIRST DAY he took office as president of Real Madrid, Ramon Calderon was convinced that there were people out to get him. If so, it took them two-and-a-half years to do so – but when the end came he only had himself to blame, an air of dishonesty and disappointment hanging over his short-lived but extraordinarily eventful tenure.

Although it was Calderon's unfortunate ability to put his foot in his mouth, and his even more unfortunate inability to sign the players he had promised to deliver – Kaka and Cristiano Ronaldo chief amongst them – that did most to make him unpopular during his reign, it came to a premature close because of a newspaper sting in which he was accused of rigging the club's AGM.

It was a brilliant exposé, drawn out cleverly over three days from January 13. "Calderon robbed the assembly," ran the cover of the sports daily *Marca*. The newspaper alleged that people had been infiltrated into the club's December 7, 2008 AGM in order to vote for Calderon. The president denied the allegations, describing them as a "low" act, lacking in all credibility. That night Luis Barcena, director of *socios* (members) and responsible for organising the assembly, told a press conference he would investigate and take whatever action was necessary.

Marca, though, had only just begun. The following day it published a follow-up which included photos of the 10 men who shouldn't have been there: some because they were not *compromisarios* (members with a voice and vote for the assembly), some because they were but shouldn't have been (because their form wasn't completed correctly or because they had not been members long enough to qualify) and one because he was an Atletico Madrid season-ticket holder. Strategically placed, they were aggressive during the assembly. All voted in Calderon's favour.

This time, Calderon could not stand aside and for the second successive night there was a late press conference at the Santiago Bernabeu.

With his directors lined up behind him, the president declared his innocence. It was true, he admitted, that people had been at the AGM that should not have been. The man responsible, he insisted, was a 25-year-old called Mariano Rodriguez de Barutell, "Nanin", who worked in the *socios'* department and had sneaked in some of his friends. What Calderon could not explain was why; but Nanin was promptly sacked. So too, as the man with ultimate responsibility, was Barcena.

Calderon, meanwhile, continued to deny any culpability. "None of us have participated directly or indirectly in the presence of unauthorised people in the last assembly of Real Madrid, I swear on my honour," he said. Then he added the phrase that would be his undoing, insisting that he did not know the men in the photos and had very little relationship with Nanin.

He had played into *Marca's* hands. The following day the newspaper – always a step ahead, its plan of action perfectly mapped out, its judgement as to Calderon's next move spot on – published photos showing a handful of those who sneaked into the assembly on holiday with Calderon's son and his brother. Far from hardly knowing them, it appeared they were close family friends. Another hit came when Nanin insisted to the newspaper he had only followed orders.

It had not been proved definitively that Calderon himself rigged the AGM. Nor was the motivation behind the sting entirely clear, with suggestions Calderon's enemies from both outside and within the club may have directed the campaign. But his dishonesty was laid bare (especially when, a couple of days later and having by now walked, he attended a private party at a well-known Madrid disco alongside his collaborators and friends, including Barcena and Nanin).

Calderon's position was untenable. His board rebelled, saying either he resigned or they would walk out en masse. His wife, too, asked him to go. Eventually, reluctantly, he did so – a tear in his eye, a bitter parting shot on his lips, in which he described his enforced resignation as a "victory for evil and injustice". Less than 24 hours after insisting that "only cowards and those with something to hide resign", Calderon resigned.

Vice-president Vicente Boluda was handed the reins but who will take over in the long term is not yet clear, although there is one, extremely familiar candidate better placed than anyone else. Elections have been called for the summer – 12 months ahead of schedule – and although he has not uttered a single word in public, the coast is clear for the return of the architect of the *galacticos* policy, one Florentino Perez.

Sid Lowe

I'm innocent...Calderon, flanked by the board, answers allegations that he rigged the vote at Real Madrid's AGM but his position proved untenable

Your turn now...Calderon with successor Boluda

Payback...Gourcuff's form on loan at Bordeaux could make Milan regret freezing him out

Yoann Gourcuff
'New Zizou' lighting way for Bordeaux

FRANCE

FAR TOO MANY young French midfield creators in recent times have failed to live up to the "new Zidane" hyperbole. Of that inflated number, only Yoann Gourcuff has truly looked worthy of the label and he proved it once again with a compelling entry for Goal of the Season in Bordeaux's 4-0 demolition of Paris Saint-Germain in January.

The great Zizou, who served Bordeaux with distinction in the early 1990s, must have had flashbacks on witnessing Gourcuff's remarkable effort against the Parisians. His back to goal as he controlled the ball with the sole of his left-boot, the 22-year-old spun through 180 degrees to confound one defender and side-stepped another before poking the ball home. Faultless technique, panache and decisiveness in one fluid movement of beauty.

"Gourcuff is Zidane" ran the subsequent headline in *L'Equipe*. Yet true to form, the young Breton refused to play the self-centred game, remaining his customary modest self. "I really can't explain how I did it," he said of his goal. "It was a matter of pure instinct. You try certain off-the-cuff things. Sometimes they work, sometimes they don't. I just tried to get free, to make some room for myself and didn't hesitate to go for goal.

"I let other people make their comparisons. But what I will say is that, like so many of my generation, I grew up admiring Zidane. It's natural to want to copy the moves of the best – and Zizou was just that."

On loan to Bordeaux this season from Milan, where he spent the best part of two campaigns on the bench, Gourcuff has bounced back spectacularly in the past few months, constantly impressing for a side pushing hard to end Lyon's domestic hegemony. He also won his first full cap for France earlier in the season and saved *Les Bleus* coach Raymond Domenech his job in October with a long-range missile which earned a 2-2 draw in Romania.

The all-important question is where Gourcuff will be playing next term. Bordeaux have an option to buy him for £15million and even such a parsimonious president as Jean-Louis Triaud would be hard-pressed to turn down that particular sale of the century. As for Milan, whose powers-that-be privately concede they could have given Gourcuff more encouragement, they hope to convince him to give them a second chance.

They will have to be at their most persuasive. Gourcuff's father Christian, coach of Ligue 1 Lorient, makes no secret of his anger at the way his son was treated at the San Siro.

"The difference between his form with Bordeaux and Milan is that he has the faith of his coach [Laurent Blanc] at the moment," claims Gourcuff snr. "The truth is he didn't have the confidence of Carlo Ancelotti, who concentrated on older players and limited first-team rotation. That, of course, is his right. But the parameters should have been made clear to us from the outset.

"The arrival at Milan of Emerson was a sign of the priorities there. The loan deal involving [David] Beckham further proves the point. Look at [Mathieu] Flamini. Before leaving Arsenal for Milan he was on the verge of breaking into the French team. Now he's out of circulation in Serie A."

Milan supremo Adriano Galliani says Gourcuff's future is tied to either Milan or Bordeaux; Christian Gourcuff is not so sure. "The release clause is ambiguous and there's the possibility of him being put up for sale," he says.

Interested parties in England and Spain, take note.

Nick Bidwell

Lukas Podolski
Bayern misfit is heading home

GERMANY

BAYERN MUNICH'S deeply frustrated national team striker Lukas Podolski will be released in June from what he regards as his "golden handcuffs".

To his delight, former club Koln, who banked £8.3million when he joined Bayern in July 2006, have agreed to spend an identical sum to bring him back.

"Poldi fever" has already hit Cologne, where season-ticket sales for next season should easily top the current 25,000 mark. There's just one potential snag: the deal is null and void if Koln, nine points above the drop zone at the winter break, go down.

"As a second division club we couldn't possibly entertain him," said general manager Michael Meier, probably the only one playing down the euphoria. Coach Christoph Daum described the move as "a milestone in the history of this club".

Podolski's decision to quit Bayern was inevitable. Since the Bavarians bought Luca Toni and Miroslav Klose in the summer of 2007 his first-team starts have been rationed, and when he has made an appearance he often cuts a forlorn figure, dreadfully short of confidence.

Certain commentators believe the 23-year-old is making a mistake in going back to, at best, a mid-table club with no chance of European football.

Podolski, though, will have none of it. He said: "I had enough offers [Manchester City, Real Madrid, Juventus, Roma and Marseille were reportedly among the keenest] but the truth is I couldn't imagine myself playing anywhere but Koln."

The danger is the next three months or so could be extremely uncomfortable for him. Bayern coach Jurgen Klinsmann, who set great store by Podolski when Germany boss, is no longer a fan.

"Lukas has to feel that he's well and truly settled in a team," said Klinsmann. "That can work every few months in the national team, but not in the Bundesliga. At Bayern, he hasn't been robust enough."

Nick Bidwell

Cold comfort...but Podolski can dream of warmer times back at Koln

Net buster...Barrios chalked up 37 goals for Colo Colo in 2008

Lucas Barrios
The world's No1 goalscorer

CHILE

HE MAY HAVE scored more top-flight goals than any other player last season, but nobody at Argentina's famous Mar del Plata resort recognised Lucas Barrios when he was there in the January break.

"No wonder," says Barrios, the 24-year-old Argentinian who struck 37 times in 38 opening and closing championship games for Chile's Colo Colo to win statisticians IFFHS's award for the best top-flight goalscorer of 2008. "I made my debut with Argentinos Juniors at 17, but as often happens with youngsters from junior teams when there is no room in the first team, I had to leave."

He joined Tigre when they were in the second division but never got a game so moved to Chile and Deportes Temuco. But his breakthrough season came with Cobreloa in 2006 when he scored 26 goals in 32 games.

A move to Mexico's Atlas followed but Barrios' ambitions were again frustrated. "There were two good players in my position and I asked coach Miguel Brindisi to let me go as I wanted to play," he said. "Colo Colo took a chance and luckily I was able to pay them back.

"As far as top scorer goes, I knew it was a close race with Ajax's Klaas-Jan Huntelaar [now at Real Madrid], but in the Chilean championship play-offs I managed to score seven goals and that settled it. Imagine if I had got those 37 in Europe – I would really be famous and rich!"

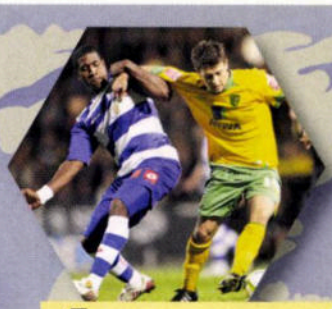
That still might happen with Nancy, Genoa and Panathinaikos reportedly interested . Internationally, however, his heart remains with Argentina. Some want him to take out Chilean nationality and play for his adopted country but Barrios says: "I won't out of respect for Chilean players. Anyway, I'm Argentinian and dream of playing for my country."

Eric Weil

THE WORLD IN NUMBERS

FOREIGN-PLAYER QUOTAS

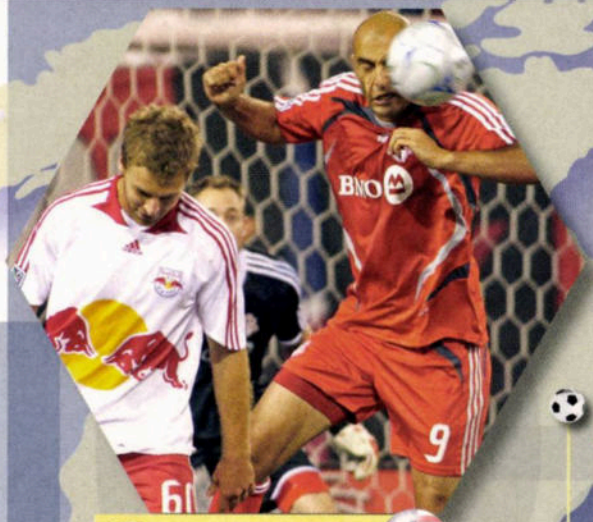
How many non-nationals are allowed?



4

ENGLAND

The number of "home-grown" players to be included in Football League squads under proposals being considered by the Football League following a meeting in December. The changes, if approved, are set to take effect from the beginning of next season. The new rule would require at least four players from a club's 16-man matchday squad to have been registered domestically for a minimum of three seasons, prior to the player's 21st birthday.



8

UNITED STATES

The number of foreign players allowed in a Major League Soccer squad. The League increased the number from four senior and three youth imports in a bid to help clubs attract more stars.

5

MEXICO

The number of foreign players allowed per team in the Mexican championship.

3

BRAZIL

The number of foreign players allowed per team in the Brazilian championship.

7

CHILE

The number of foreign players allowed per team in the Chilean championship.

6

PERU

The number of foreign players allowed per team in the Peruvian championship.

4

ARGENTINA

The number of foreign players allowed per team in the Argentinian championship.

8

EUROPE

The minimum number of "home-grown" players that UEFA insists Champions League clubs must include in their 25-man squads. Of the eight, four must have been trained by the club's own academy and a further four trained within the same national association. UEFA defines a club-trained player as one who has been registered with the club for a minimum of three seasons, between the ages of 15 and 21.

4

CHINA

The number of foreign players allowed in a Chinese club squad. Only three are permitted on the pitch at one time.

3

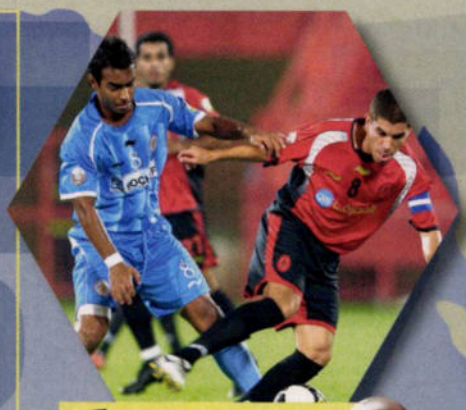
ASIA

The number of foreign players allowed in team line-ups in the Asian Champions League knockout stages.

0

TUNISIA

The number of foreign goalkeepers allowed in the north African country's League.



6

QATAR

The number of foreign players allowed per team in the Qatari championship.

4

JAPAN

The number of foreigners allowed in a J.League team. Three can be born anywhere in the world and a fourth can be played if he comes from the Asian Confederation – the so-called "Asian berth". Japanese reserve teams often field a further two foreign players on a minimum-wage "C-Contract", provided they are aged under 20.

5

SOUTH AFRICA

The number of foreign players allowed per team in the South African Premier League.

4

AUSTRALIA

The number of foreign players allowed in an A.League squad, although the authorities are considering an increase to five.

PADDY AGNEW
in Rome

Berlusconi keeps Kaka...for now

"Milan have made it clear that they would be prepared to sell Kaka if the money was right"

LIKE JUST ABOUT everything that has to do with Milan, the extenuated January saga relative to Manchester City's failure to buy the club's Brazilian ace Kaka for a reported £100million started and ended with the *Rossoneri's* all-powerful owner: the Italian prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi.

The 72-year-old had surprised us all when he gave the go-ahead to the English club to talk to the player; in the past Milan had always given short shrift to would-be purchasers of Kaka. This time, and not surprisingly given the huge sum of money allegedly on offer, Berlusconi and Milan were tempted – even to the point of waving goodbye to arguably the club's best player of the last four seasons.

However, it was not to be. The deal fell through on the evening of Monday, January 19, exactly one week after the news had broken that Man City's executive chairman, Garry Cook, was in Milan to negotiate the most expensive transfer of all time. It was Berlusconi himself who took time off from state duties to make the dramatic announcement to the popular TV football programme *Il Processo Del Lunedi*.

"Kaka is staying with us," he declared. "The money does not interest him. He's a wonderful guy."

So what had gone wrong? Two nights previously, Milan had beaten Fiorentina 1-0 at the San Siro and the game had ended with seemingly emotional embraces between Kaka and his team-mates. Many were tempted to conclude that these were indeed "farewell" scenes and that the Man City deal was as good as in the bag.

Certainly, the Milan fans believed that Kaka was on his way, with the Fiorentina game being marked by a series of banners urging the club not to sell him. The fans also staged noisy and angry protests outside the club's headquarters in Via Turati, while other diehard supporters camped outside Kaka's fourth-floor apartment in central Milan in an attempt to persuade him to stay.

The most clear indication that Kaka was on his way had come on the Saturday afternoon prior to the Fiorentina game when Berlusconi had taken a short break from political campaigning in Sardinia to tell reporters that "you can't refuse an offer like this".

Significantly, in these times of worldwide economic crisis, the Milan owner then went on to suggest that selling Kaka represented a belt-tightening exercise for his club.

If Milan were to hold on to Kaka, he suggested, the Brazilian would be looking for a huge pay rise by way of compensation. At present, Kaka earns £8.5m a year with Milan, while Man City were reportedly offering him £14m per annum after tax. If Kaka got his pay rise, then all his illustrious team-mates would be looking for one too said Berlusconi, making it clear that he had no intention of granting such across-the-board hikes. All in all, it made much better sense for Milan, disappointment notwithstanding, to sell the 26-year-old.

Berlusconi, the Milan fans, the media and Man City's Garry Cook all spent the weekend awaiting the arrival from Brazil of Kaka's father, Bosco Leite, who is also the player's manager, with Leite and Cook then expected to wrap up the deal in a meeting in downtown Milan.

Fatal reply

That Monday meeting took place all right, but it allegedly broke down when Kaka's father, after six hours of detailed discussion, eventually asked the golden question: "How much are you offering?" Rather than present the Leite family with an offer there and then, Cook reportedly offered the "fatal" reply to the effect that Man City would send an email the next day with the formal offer. At that point, Kaka's father got up from the table to phone his famous son and say: "We're just wasting time here, Ricky."

Kaka, a born-again Christian who often wears that famous T-shirt reading "I Belong To Jesus" under his Milan shirt, explained the outcome the next day to the Milan TV channel, saying: "Milan's history is my history, Milan is my home. In the past Milan had always rejected offers for me but this time, when the club began to examine this offer, I thought maybe this was a sign from God for me to go. I've prayed a lot in these last few days and God told me to stay."

Not surprisingly, the Man City folks were less convinced about the intervention of the Almighty, with Cook publicly claiming that Milan, because of "political considerations and the pressure of public opinion", had "bottled out" of the deal. Cook's annoyance was understandable.

After all, he had gone about things in the correct manner, informing Milan of Man City's interest. On top of that, far from the media spotlight, Man City representatives had met with their Milan counterparts in both Paris and London in early January. Milan allegedly first asked for £140m, while the original Man City offer was around £79m. In the end, they compromised on £91m, of

Why Manchester City's world-record bid failed to land the Brazilian, but future approaches may not

A show of support...Milan fans made their feelings known before the home game against Fiorentina

"Kaka and Milan have answered [no] to Real Madrid in the past. I don't see any reason to change our strategy" *Silvio Berlusconi*

which £4.7m would have gone to Sao Paulo of Brazil – the club who had originally sold Kaka to Milan. Whatever the precise figure, Man City clearly felt that the deal was about as good as landed.

However, as Ireland manager Giovanni Trapattoni famously says: "Never say 'cat' until you've got it in the bag."

To be fair, some of us (including your correspondent) had gone on record right from the start to argue that this deal would never happen. At the end of the day, there was no problem convincing Milan to take the money and run, but rather there was a very big problem convincing Kaka that he could afford to take the risk of moving to a club currently struggling at the wrong end of the Premier League table.

"At the end of the day, there was no problem convincing Milan to take the money and run"

When Kaka joined his team-mates for a friendly against Hannover two days after his "great refusal", the club's managing director, Adriano Galliani, presented him with an infamous quotation from the great American novelist Mark Twain, who once said: "I would like to live in Manchester, England. The transition between Manchester and death would be unnoticeable."

His fellow professionals had all underlined the possible risks of such a move to Kaka. After all, he was about to go from one of European football's superpowers to a club threatened with a relegation battle. A transfer to Man City would also mean the Brazilian giving up on Champions League football for at least two, if not more, seasons. And just how much time would it take Man City to build a genuine, title-challenging unit?

Home boy...Kaka greets fans from the window of his apartment

Liverpool's Spanish striker Fernando Torres put it aptly when he pointed out that, at the end of their careers, top-flight players like to recall what they won with which club, telling reporters: "Imagine 10 years after you stop playing, you go back, you look around and you are not in any picture, you have no medals, no trophies; it is like you played for nothing. You may have a fantastic car, a fantastic home, but what does it matter? No player looks back and says I won more money."

Former Juventus striker and Chelsea manager Gianluca Vialli touched on the same note when he said: "Kaka plays for Milan, one of the strongest clubs in the world. Both Real Madrid and Chelsea wanted him in the past and he said no to them. Now there's this offer which is highly advantageous from the economic viewpoint but not at all interesting from the playing viewpoint.

"Sure, the economic considerations are important, but in my opinion it is even more important to hang up your boots with £60m in the bank having played for Real Madrid or Milan, rather than with £90m in the bank having spent years with Milan but then gone to Man City."

Grow old at Milan

So Kaka is now heading for membership of that glittering galaxy of golden oldies know as Milan. Given the club's loyalty to players such as 40-year-old Paolo Maldini, will Kaka now get his chance, as he said early on in the Man City negotiations, "to grow old at Milan" and one day take over the captain's armband from Maldini?

Well, yes and maybe no. No sooner had the Man City deal been abandoned than a whole flurry of speculation emerged from Spain suggesting that, come next June, Kaka would be on his way to Real Madrid. The reasoning behind such talk is obvious enough. The "cat" is indeed very much out of the bag, even if *Il Trap* cannot catch it. Milan have made it clear that they would be prepared to sell Kaka if the money was right.

By next summer the experienced Florentino Perez, who served as president from 2000 until 2006, could be back in charge at Real if, as looks likely, he wins the club's presidential elections. And it seems safe to assume that Perez will base his electoral campaign on, among other things, the promise to bring a major star to the Santiago Bernabeu – someone like Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo...or maybe Kaka.

Asked about this possibility just days after the Man City offer had fallen through, Berlusconi was categorical, telling the *Quotidiano Nazionale*: "Kaka and Milan have already answered [no] to Real Madrid in the past. I don't see any reason to change our strategy. And then in these last few days he has shown eloquent proof of his attachment to Milan. What makes his decision all the more remarkable is that he knew all too well that Milan would not increase his salary."

Milan would not, but will Real? The Kaka transfer *tormentone* [saga] may be back to haunt us again this coming summer. ●

Heartfelt...Kaka has played more than 250 games for Milan since joining the club from Sao Paulo in 2003

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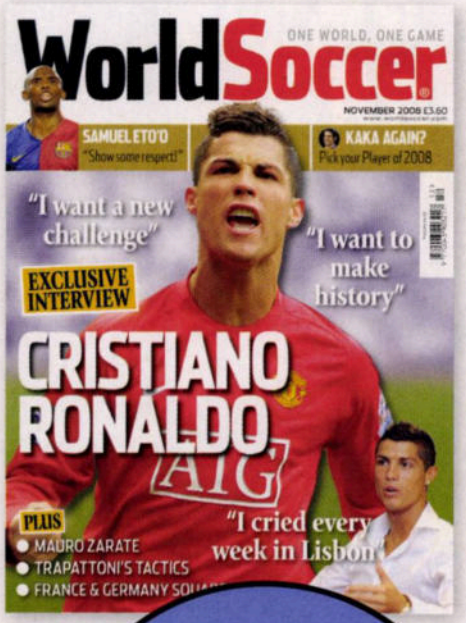

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On a different wavelength...City chief executive Garry Cook claimed Kaka's representatives could not grasp the complexity of the negotiaitions

Manchester City's pursuit of Kaka was a morality tale that encapsulated all that is wrong with the modern game

Football's spirit, bottled

DAVID CONN
in Manchester

IN OVERBLOWN but recessionary times, football needed a morality tale, and the saga of Sheikh Mansour's Manchester City, "the world's richest club", bidding to sign arguably the world's best player for football's largest-ever amount of money, delivered it in the January sales.

The telling of this particular story is best done starting at the end, with Kaka staying at the San Siro, not opting to be serenaded by Blue Moon, City fans' signature anthem ("you saw me standing alone, without a dream in my heart, without a love of my own"). When a bid to sign a player crumples in failure, clubs mostly do not comment, but over Kaka, City decided to make a forthright exception.

Rather than offer some routine blandishments, thanking the player, the other club, expressing the wish to do business again sometime, Garry Cook, City's executive chairman, previously a salaryman at Nike, was authorised by his Abu Dhabi bosses to throw some public teacups. Just back from Milan, he called in Manchester's football press pack to pour scorn on Kaka's representatives and lambast Milan.

The great Italian club had "bottled it" and given in to "political pressure" claimed Cook. If the detail of this was not crystal clear, the drift was – Milan had been prepared to sell Kaka, for £91million, and had allowed Kaka's representatives, principally his father, Bosco Leite, to discuss moving to City. According to Cook, City never actually made an offer, however, because he wanted to drill down into the player's merchandising and sponsorship contracts – Cook's specialist business experience – so City could understand how they would put their own commercial plans into action.

Yet to Cook's bewilderment, Kaka's dad was not prepared to disclose all that and instead kept asking the same question of the men whose role in football is to represent Abu Dhabi's oil trillions: what do you intend to pay my boy?

Cook's reaction was to allege that Kaka's representatives "could not understand the complexity of what we were doing", implying that Kaka's dad was crudely obsessing about his son's wages and so missing the bigger picture of the branding City had in store.

The only detail in which City's version differed from the reports coming out of Milan was about which side pulled out. Cook said City did, never making an offer because Kaka's people would not answer the questions. The Milan side claimed that after six hours of talks with Cook, Simon Pearce (the Abu Dhabi royal communications strategist and City director), another unnamed senior executive and three lawyers, Cook and Pearce said they would have an overnight think and email something over in the morning. At that point Leite is said to have had enough and called off talks.

Cook's reaction was a little littered with brand-speak: "Is he [Kaka] a great footballer?" he asked rhetorically. "Yes. Does he represent all the values you would want to have as an ambassador of the sport global, and were we looking for the opportunity to joint venture in areas that would take this club on to a different platform? Yes. But unfortunately the landscape changed and his representatives wanted to talk about how much we were going to pay him.

"We never met the player, we only met the representatives, we never actually made him an offer on personal terms. So it's very difficult to turn down something that you've not been offered."

Which was true, but only up to a point. City's insistence on publicly airing all this only convinced many observers that the newly loaded club was failing to appreciate some simple truths of the situation, and of football generally. Kaka's side and City's delegation may very well not have reached the point of negotiating the wage, and whether it would be the reported £500,000 a week, but the plain fact was that the only reason a club like Manchester City was even in the room at the San Siro was because it is backed by huge money now.

And the only reason why a player like Kaka – brilliant, sinuous, lethal, sprinting to the edge of greatness – would join Manchester City now would be for money. When he is at Milan – albeit an opera house of ageing legends as much as starlets – and could take his pick of Europe's clubs, why else would he choose to be part of the City project, whose most optimistic hope is that in several years, by dint of many Mansour millions, they may just nudge towards the outer edges of where, say, United have been for years?

Massive wage

City may not have put a figure on it, but a massive wage was there, on the table, for the taking. If Kaka's father had really wanted money, he surely could have played ball, patiently answered all City's questions, and veered the conversation gently round to the indelicate question of what Kaka would actually be paid. By being uncooperative, grumpy and ultimately allowing City's group to go home bruised, resentful and empty-handed, Kaka's father did indeed turn a fortune down, whether it was formally offered or not.

It was absorbing to see the star players, and coaches, emerge to explain that although they earn beyond most people's imaginings, there remains to those who excel at football more to the sport than how much money they can make. Arrigo Sacchi, Real Madrid's former technical director, lamenting perceived turmoil in Robinho's psyche, regretted that the Brazilian had gone to City. Sacchi said it was for the money, "not a footballing choice", and so Robinho had "lost the happiness" which playing the game always bestowed on him.

To the millions of fans and football lovers not in the room at the San Siro – without food, Cook complained – talking fruitlessly about how Kaka's "brand" is commercially exploited, the story had some clarity. Kaka, the cleanest cut of the game's stars, who famously devotes his life and talents to Christianity, would have chosen a move to City only for money. And when he said no, smiling, hanging his Milan shirt out of an upstairs window, he was stating that there is more to football than money.

And it was at that – whatever City's grumbles about the detail – that those who worry for football's soul clenched a collective fist and punched the air. ●

"Kaka, the cleanest cut of the game's stars, would have chosen a move to City only for money. And when he said no, he was stating that there is more to football than money"

DISPATCHES

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Little and large...Portuguesa's Bruno Rodrigo blocks a shot from Hernanes of Sao Paulo in the Paulista championship

The 27 state championships are preventing Brazilian domestic football from reaching its full potential

Big is better

TIM VICKERY
in Rio de Janeiro

FOR THE BIG CLUBS in Sao Paulo, Christmas shopping and the January sales mean cherry-picking time in Rio. In the biggest coup of the festive period, Corinthians took Ronaldo from under the nose of Flamengo while also snapping up midfielder Tulio and striker Jorge Henrique from Botafogo, who also lost playmaker Lucio Flavio and left-back Triguinho to Santos.

Pele's former club also signed left-footed Madson from Vasco da Gama and Flamengo's reserve right-back Luizinho. Meanwhile, national champions Sao Paulo brought in three excellent players from Fluminense – centre-forward Washington, midfielder Arouca and left-back Junior Cesar – as well as Vasco's rampaging right-back Wagner Diniz and centre-back Renato Silva from Botafogo.

Palmeiras, Sao Paulo's other major club, did not look to Rio for their reinforcements. Instead, they went north to bring in the highly rated Marquinhos and Willians Santana from Vitoria of Bahia, and south for promising striker Keirrison (Coritiba), midfielder Cleiton Xavier (Figueirense) and centre-backs Danilo and Mauricio (Atletico Paranaense and Coritiba respectively).

This accumulation of talent is not difficult to understand because, unlike the rest of Brazil, clubs in Sao Paulo are the only ones who can offer good players something worthwhile to do domestically for the first four months of the year.

Quality state championship

With the national championship being played from mid-May to early December, Brazil stages its 27 state championships from late January until early May and, as the nation's industrial powerhouse, Sao Paulo alone is rich enough to stage a state championship of quality. Even clubs from outside the giant city have the structure and resources to maintain strong teams – as Sao Caetano showed at the start of the decade when they came from nowhere to reach the Final of the Libertadores Cup.

Elsewhere the state championships pit giant clubs, with millions of supporters, against teams so tiny they could hire a small fleet of taxis to get their fans to the game. In a one-off cup context this might have some charm, but in some convoluted mixture of league phases plus play-offs it makes no sense whatsoever, in football or financial terms.

Well aware of this, players continue to vote with their feet and congregate in Sao Paulo. Little wonder, then, that Sao Paulo (with the last three national titles), Corinthians (2005) and Santos (2004) have established a *Paulista* monopoly of the title. Cruzeiro of Belo Horizonte, winners in 2003, were the last non-Sao Paulo champions of Brazil.

This internal imbalance is just one of the negative consequences of the state championships' continued existence; others are much more fundamental. But while scrapping the state championships would be the single biggest step forward Brazilian football could take, such a revolution is very unlikely in the short term.

The state championships have enormous tradition and the little clubs are the lifeblood of the Brazilian game, according to folklore, because they produce the stars of the future. Well, not any more they don't.

These days, the only small clubs producing players are new ones set up by agents for this specific purpose, creating the anomaly of a club with excellent facilities but no real desire to pick up supporters or challenge for titles. But while the traditional small clubs are too poor to do anything about this, they do have a vote in the state federation – which generally carries the same weight as the vote of the big clubs.

These small clubs thus hold the balance of power in the choice of state federation president, who in turn holds similar status in the election for president of the CBF, Brazil's FA. So you have two layers of mutually perpetuating bureaucracy.

Ricardo Teixeira has been CBF president for 20 years and his mandate extends until after the 2014 World Cup. Getting rid of the state championships would alienate his power base, so the state presidents retain their tournaments to administer, which keeps them – and their supporters, the little clubs – happy. More than half the state presidents have been in office for over 10 years and some date back to the mid-1970s. The entire structure is based on the tail wagging the dog.

So why do the big clubs go along with it? There was a timid breakaway attempt in 1987, but it was after 1994 that the problems began to become apparent. That year a financial-stability plan eliminated the hyperinflation which had corroded the economy – but which also made many financial activities viable. Clubs who could meet their commitments in the past by merely by paying late, now had to live in the real world, where debts were piling up.

In 2003 a typical Brazilian compromise was struck. Previously the state and national championships each took up half the year; now the former were cut back and the latter expanded – which had financial advantages but created problems of its own. It threw Brazil out of sync with the calendar in Europe and South America, with the global transfer window in the middle of the national championship.

Perhaps the sad truth is that some big club directors are happy with the current structure for unscrupulous reasons. While domestic football operates below its potential – an inevitable consequence of the state championships – it is always necessary to sell players, with the opportunities this entails for money to be diverted into private bank accounts.

Last year, a record 1,176 Brazilian players moved abroad, a process which creates dangerous vested interests. And with the World Cup coming to town there is no sign of the big clubs entering into conflict with the power structure.

In fact, the reverse is true. Sao Paulo love to present themselves as a well-run club in an incompetent industry, but even they are now falling into line. President Juvenal Juvencio declared Teixeira's 20-year reign "has benefited Brazilian football because, thanks to his political influence in FIFA, he was able to bring the 2014 World Cup to Brazil".

While everyone hopes for presents from on high – such as investments in stadiums and infrastructure needed for 2014 – no one will be challenging a system that obliges the big clubs to take part in the state championships. ●

"Ricardo Teixeira has been CBF president for 20 years. Getting rid of the state championships would alienate his power base"

DISPATCHES

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Left out...neither of last year's Asian Cup finalists, Muharraq (in red) and Safa, will take their places in this season's Asian Champions League

Only professional teams will be allowed in the revamped Asian Champions League

No room for amateurs

MICHAEL CHURCH
in Hong Kong

LESS THAN SEVEN YEARS after its launch, the Asian Champions League is undergoing an overhaul which sees the prize money and the number of participating teams increase as confederation president Mohamed Bin Hammam attempts to bring a new level of professionalism to club football in the continent.

Winners of the new-look competition will pocket £1.1million – more than double the previous amount – while a preliminary round and a round of 16 have been inserted. In addition, the Final will be played at a neutral venue – Tokyo will host the 2009 edition – rather than on a home-and-away basis, despite the success of the format in ensuring the biggest game in Asian club football was always played in front of a full house.

"We had to implement tough measures to ensure that the clubs, and the leagues they represent, are truly professional in the way they are run and play football," said Bin Hammam. "This is the only way to build up the tournament's credibility.

"At the end of the day, Asian football benefits and we're delighted to see that so many associations and clubs are doing their best to meet our competition criteria."

So strict are the new rules, which were developed and implemented by a committee headed by former J.League chairman Saburo Kawabuchi, that only 10 of Asia's 46 national associations will definitely be represented.

Japan, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, China and Iran all have four clubs in the group stage, the United Arab Emirates will contribute three guaranteed participants, Australia, Uzbekistan and Qatar have two, and Indonesia one.

The UAE and Indonesia have also been allowed to enter one club in the play-offs, while India, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam were presented with the opportunity of having one club join the two finalists from the AFC Cup in the elimination round.

This year, however, neither Muharraq of Bahrain, who won the AFC Cup, or runners-up Safa from Lebanon have entered the competition, while Vietnam declined its invitation to participate.

"The time has come for Asian club football to shed its amateurism and embrace professionalism in all aspects sincerely," said Bin Hammam.

"Only a culture of all-pervading professionalism will raise the level of Asian football."

To encourage that burgeoning professionalism, Bin Hammam also announced that clubs in the Champions League will be able to twin themselves with teams from the English Premier League. "There will be a platform for our administrators, officials and coaches to join the Premier League to gain experience from them," said Bin Hammam, who was joined by Premier League chief executive Richard Scudamore in making the announcement in Tokyo.

"We want to show some solidarity with the AFC with the relaunching of the Champions League," said Scudamore.

"It's a big event for the AFC and we understand how big it is, moving to a 32-team format, and we understand how important it is to relaunch and continually develop.

"We don't see it as a competitor, we believe in the development of professional football.

"We believe in excellence – and that is what has kept the Premier League where it is – and if we see football developing around the world, that's good news for football generally and that's good news for the Premier League."

The new format of the competition included no place in the 2009 edition for the reigning champions, meaning Japan's Gamba Osaka were in danger of not having the opportunity to defend their crown.

After a disappointing domestic League campaign, Gamba had to rely on success in the Emperor's Cup to ensure qualification and, thanks to an extra-time goal from Ryuji Bando, Akira Nishino's side successfully squeezed past Kashiwa Reysol to spare the AFC's blushes.

The draw

Gamba kick off their title defence with a home fixture against Chinese champions Shandong Luneng after being drawn in Group F alongside FC Seoul from South Korea and Indonesia's Sriwijaya.

J.League champions Kashima Antlers are in Group G with Shanghai Shenhua, South Korean champions Suwon Bluewings and the winners of the east Asian play-off featuring Thailand's Provincial Electricity Authority, Singapore Armed Forces and PSMS Medan from Indonesia.

Group H features Kawasaki Frontale, Australia's Central Coast Mariners, Tianjin Teda of China and two-time champions Pohang Steelers from South Korea, while Nagoya Grampus Eight have been placed in Group E with Ulsan Hyundai of South Korea, China's Beijing Guoan and Newcastle Jets of Australia.

The west of the continent has thrown up some intriguing groups, with two-time winners Al Ittihad from Saudi Arabia due to meet Al Jazira of the United Arab Emirates, Iran's Esteghlal and Umm Salal of Qatar in Group C.

"I think it's going to be difficult to qualify from this group," said Al Ittihad's Argentinian coach, Gabriel Calderon. "Every group is difficult. In football nothing is easy. It is possible to qualify, but it will be difficult.

"Every time we play to win and to be champion, but every other club thinks the same."

Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal have been drawn in Group A alongside Pakhtakor from Uzbekistan, Al Ahli from the United Arab Emirates and Iran's Saba Battery.

Last year's semi-finalists Bunyodkor head up Group D, which also includes Al Shabab from the UAE, Iranian club Sepahan and Al Ettifaq from Saudi Arabia.

Group B features Iran's Pirouzi, Al Shabab of Saudi Arabia and Qatar's Al Gharafa, plus the winners of the play-off between India's Dempo and Sharjah from the UAE.

After the preliminary play-off games in mid-February, the group phase of the competition starts on March 10, with the top two teams from each group progressing to the second round. ●

"This is the only way to build up the tournament's credibility. At the end of the day, Asian football benefits"

Asian Football Confederation president, Mohamed Bin Hammam

DISPATCHES

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Heads role as the worst season in Feyenoord's 101-year history continues

KLAAS-JAN DROPPERT in The Hague

Rotten in Rotterdam

"The will of the players was no longer there"

Ex-Feyenoord coach Gertjan Verbeek

WHEN FEYENOORD'S DIRECTORS held their first meeting of the year, on January 13, coach Gertjan Verbeek still had the board's full support and general director Eric Gudde was insisting the club shouldn't change tack. One day later, in the face of a growing players' revolt, Verbeek was sacked.

His appointment during the summer, after a highly successful four-year spell at Heerenveen, along with new signings Denny Landzaat, Jon Dahl Tomasson and Karim El Ahmadi was supposed to mean that the Rotterdam club – who last clinched the championship 10 years ago – could be serious title contenders in their post-centennial year.

But Verbeek's methods – based on gruelling training sessions and tough physical work in the gym – didn't impress his new charges. Even before the season kicked off Feyenoord had 10 players unavailable through injury, and after a humiliating UEFA Cup campaign, in which they lost five of their six games, the team tumbled down the league.

When he clashed with medical staff and senior players who asked him to change his ways, the clock was ticking. Only the board's support and a lack of money to pay him off had kept Verbeek in a job.

Just before the winter break, by which time the club having fallen to 12th in the Eredivisie, the newspaper *Algemeen Dagblad* revealed that a majority of the dressing room had voted in a secret poll against the coach's continued presence. Only the youngsters Diego Biseswar, Dwight Tiendalli, Leroy Fer and Georginio Wijnaldum supported Verbeek.

"The will [of the players] was no longer there," admitted Verbeek, who admitted that he noticed "a sudden change with some of his players not looking [him] in the face" at his last training session.

The break came when the club's international defender Kevin Hofland contacted the club president, Dick Van Well, and told him: "It can't go on like this." When Van Well then informed general director Eric Gudde Gudde, who earlier had claimed that Verbeek would be in charge even at Christmas 2009, it was the end of a marriage that had never worked, despite the high expectations.

Days before the restart of the League was hardly the perfect timing for a revolution but, having found the money to pay him off, Verbeek – along with assistant coach Wim Jansen and technical director Peter Bosz – were dismissed and another assistant, Leon Vlemmings, took temporary charge.

Player power...Verbeek had lost the dressing room

However, the club's misery didn't end there. After a 3-1 defeat against Heerenveen in the League, Feyenoord lost 3-0 at home to the same opponents in the Cup to equal two previous club-record lows: the record number of losses in one season (16) and the record number of home defeats in a season (seven).

At the end of January the club announced Mario Been had signed a three-year contract as Verbeek's full-time replacement, but the 45-year-old, who is presently coach at NEC, would not be taking over until the end of the season.

"I'm not a magician, but I want to build something beautiful in these three years," said Been. "I'm proud to have been allowed to become Feyenoord coach and I want the players to show pride in the club. Everyone knows Feyenoord are my club and that I have always dreamed of returning to De Kuip as coach."

Stevens quits

Verbeek isn't the only coach to have departed. Huub Stevens, who arrived at champions PSV Eindhoven from Hamburg last summer, quit feeling there was no real rapport between he and the players, "despite huge effort and many attempts to improve matters". Assistant Dwight Lodewges, 51, has taken the reins on a temporary basis and must lift a side who are out of the Champions League and 15 points adrift of leaders AZ in the Eredivisie.

Vitesse gave Hans Westerhof his marching orders because of poor results. The former Ajax and PSV coach, only in charge since the summer, had also lost his players' confidence. In a post-match press conference he complained to AZ coach Louis Van Gaal about his central defenders Civard Sprockel and Sebastien Sansoni, but didn't realise that the microphone was still on. His replacement is Den Bosch coach Theo Bos.

Utrecht must find a solution for their new coach, Ton Du Chatinier, who did not have the required papers. Brought in as assistant after four assistants had been fired in October, Du Chatinier became head coach after the club decided to part company with Willem Van Hanegem in December. The latter had been fiercely critical of the board, claiming "that 'submarine' has got no brains for football but is taking all the decisions" in a reference to new owner Frans Van Seumeren, whose company Mammoet were responsible for the salvage of the Russian atomic sub *Kursk*.

Roda chairman Serve Kuijer resigned after his family had been intimidated by the club's fans. They blame Kuijer for starting negotiations with neighbour club Fortuna Sittard for a possible merger.

Meanwhile, Ajax have signed Rob Wielaert from Twente, who hired Peter Wisgerhof from NEC as his replacement and allowed Stein Huysegems to join Belgian club Genk. ●

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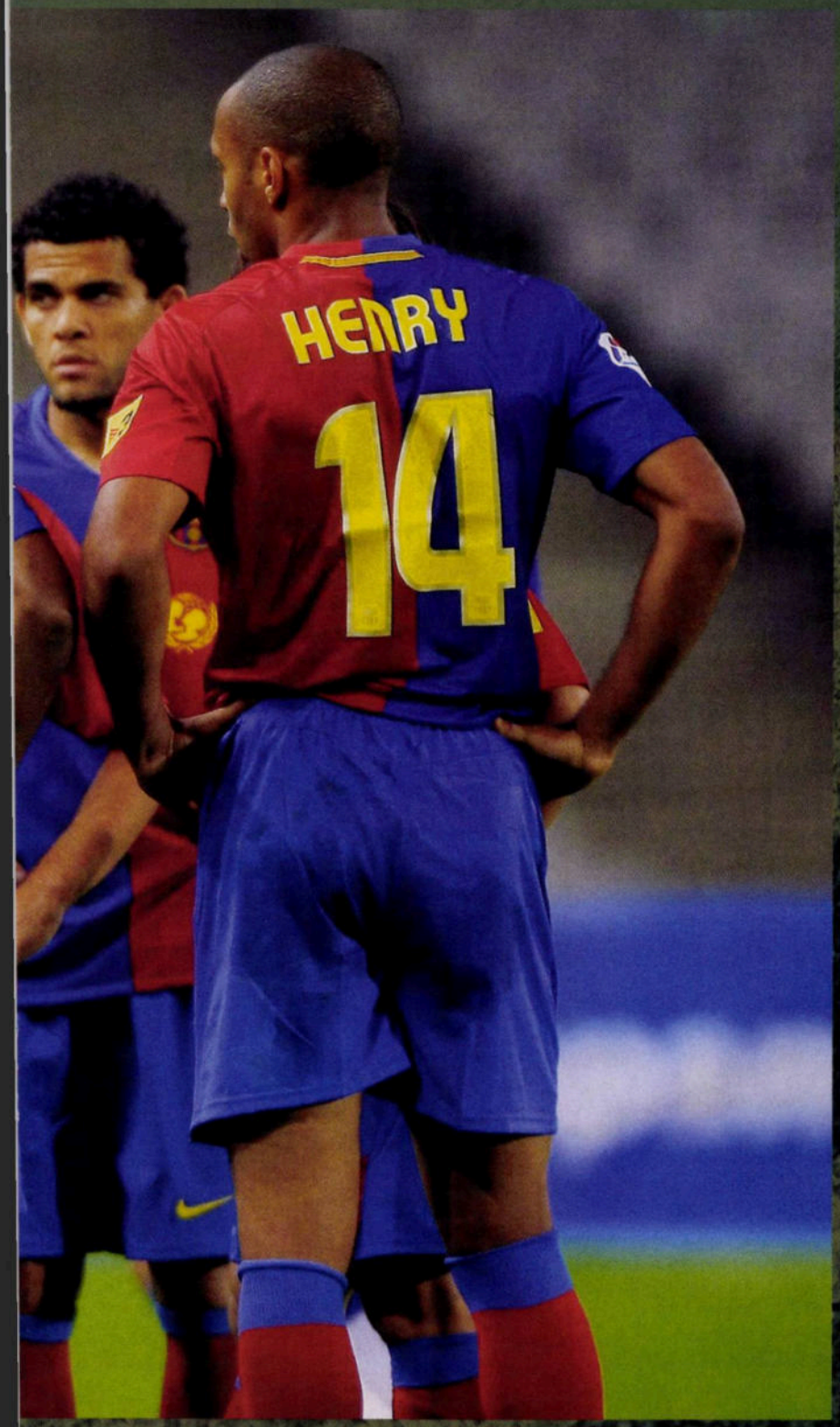
Losing battle...keeper Henk Timmer does his best to keep out Heerenveen in the Cup, but it was another defeat for Feyenoord

Camp Nou

Pep talk...Guardiola has instilled a sense of collective and individual responsibility into Barca this season

revolution



In the space of just six months, Pep Guardiola has transformed Barcelona from a squad of underperformers into Europe's most exciting team. Sid Lowe reports

THEY SAY that there are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics. But sometimes the stats are true. Sometimes there's just no arguing with the numbers. Sometimes the case they make is so overwhelming as to become simply incontrovertible. This is one of those times. This time, the arithmetic does go hand in hand with the aesthetic. This time, crunching the numbers reveals just how comprehensively Barcelona are crushing their opponents; just how far they have come in six short months.

So let's do the maths. At the back end of last season Barcelona were forced to give the newly crowned champions, Real Madrid, a humiliating guard of honour at the Santiago Bernabeu before succumbing to an embarrassing 4-1 defeat. They finished the season 18 points behind their rivals.

Fast forward to the halfway stage of this season and, having played every side in La Liga once, they sat 12 points ahead of Real. In 19 matches they had lost just once and drawn twice, winning 16 times.

That solitary defeat came on the opening day of the season, and one of the draws was a week later. In other words, in the next 17 league games Barcelona won all bar one. And speaking of bars, they also hit the woodwork a staggering 17 times. That's more posts than city rivals Espanyol had goals. And we're not talking about doses of bad luck in games that were already over, either. An inch the other way and they would have reached the halfway mark with a 100 per cent record.

As it was, they got there with 50 points: the best tally for that stage of the season in Spanish football history. Their 12-point lead

"Their 12-point lead was the highest ever at the midway point...Barcelona weren't just winning, they were utterly dominating"

was comfortably the highest ever at the midway point. Only Real Madrid's 1960-61 team had matched their unbeaten run of 16 games. And no one had ever completed eight successive victories on the road as Barcelona had just done.

It's not just that Barcelona were winning; they were utterly dominating. And there could be no complaints about good fortune, no whingeing that they had defended their way to success or bored their way to victory, and certainly no accusations that they had kicked their way to the top.

You couldn't even say it was all the product of a huge squad as Barca had used fewer players than any other side.

More possession, more passes

More stats? Well they reached the midway stage having maintained more possession than any other team, boasting the ball for some 590 minutes – over one hundred minutes more than second-placed Real Madrid. They also completed more passes than anyone else, with their 9,104 being 2,000 more than Real. And this wasn't just the aimless possession of previous seasons either. They put together more passing moves than any other side in the league, scoring more than 50 per cent of their goals from team moves.

They lost the ball less than any other side in Spain – but when they did they invariably won it back again, recovering possession more than any other side too. They had more shots, more balls into the box and more corners than anyone else.

Even down at the other end it was the same story as they conceded fewer corners and fewer shots than anyone else. No team saw the ball in their penalty area less often, and only Deportivo La Coruna committed fewer fouls, helping to explain how Barca played 19 matches without conceding a single penalty and were shown fewer yellow cards than anyone else (despite opponents' increasingly popular tactic of booting them up in the air).

Back up front, Samuel Eto'o was La Liga's top scorer, bagging 18 goals in 18 games, while Leo Messi scored more times away from home than anyone else in the country.

Ah, the goals. It's all about the goals. At the halfway stage they had scored 59 of them – the highest total ever. They put six past Atletico, Valladolid and Sporting, and five past Almeria and Deportivo. Against Malaga on a waterlogged pitch they scored four. Valencia arrived as contenders but Barcelona scored four more. Sevilla had the best defensive record in the league yet Barca still scored three at the Sanchez Pizjuan.

Averaging over three goals a game, they are on course to break Real Madrid's haul of 107, clinched with John Toshack in the dugout and Hugo Sanchez in the penalty area.

Only once, on the opening day against Numancia, did Barcelona fail to score. And as if to prove that was a fluke, they began the second half of the season by beating the team from Soria 4-1.

Daniel Alves, a £32million summer signing from Sevilla, has made a huge difference to the side, giving Barcelona bite, pace, vision, attacking balance, width, the element of surprise and an extra outlet when things are not going well. He has delivered 10 assists from full-back (if you can even call him that) and it is no coincidence that the club's right wing, where Alves screeches up and down, and where Leo Messi begins his mazy runs, has produced three times as many goals as the left.

Of course, it's not all about Alves. One of the most remarkable things about Barcelona is that these are essentially the same players that performed so poorly last season. Although Gerard Pique and Seydou Keita were signed in the summer, of Barcelona's genuinely regular starters Alves is the only one who was not there last season.

Motivation has returned

What has changed is the coach. In fact, as one insider puts it: "This season Barca have two things they didn't have last season: hunger and a coach." That might be unfair on Frank Rijkaard, the man who led Barca to two League titles and the Champions League, but under the Dutchman they had begun to slip; the professionalism and the desire had gone. As Rijkaard's assistant Eusebio admitted: "After winning the Champions League it was hard to find the motivation." Under Guardiola, that motivation has returned.

Unexpectedly so. As the captain and undisputed spiritual leader of the "Dream Team" that won four successive League titles and the club's first-ever European Cup, Guardiola was the focal point of the club's most emblematic side of all time, the metronome that kept them ticking over, constantly moving the ball on with a single touch.

Born in Catalonia, schooled barely 100metres from Camp Nou, a former Barca ball-boy, a charismatic and eloquent

On fire...Eto'o averaged a goal every game in the first half of the season

MOVERS AND SHAKERS The key figures at Camp Nou

President...Laporta

Star attraction...Messi

JOAN LAPORTA
Lawyer who first emerged at Barcelona through the "Blue Elephant" opposition group in the late 1990s. Club president since 2003 and re-elected in 2006 for four more years. Suffered a vote of no confidence last year but survived because his opponents failed to get a two-thirds majority. His position has been hugely strengthened by the team's recent success.

Influence...Cruyff

PEP GUARDIOLA
Head coach who succeeded Frank Rijkaard last summer after one season in charge of Barcelona B. Former club captain and a member of Johan Cruyff's "Dream Team" which won the 1992 European Cup and four consecutive Spanish League titles in the 1990s.

Boss...Guardiola

FRANCESC "TITO" VILANOVA
Guardiola's assistant has played a crucial role in advising the club's new head coach.

LEO MESSI
The Argentina wizard is easily the biggest and most high-profile playing figure at the club since the departure of Ronaldinho last summer.

JOHAN CRUYFF
Spent five years as a player and eight as coach at Camp Nou, the Dutchman has not held any official post at the club since quitting as coach in 1996. However, he still lives in Barcelona and is a hugely influential figure behind the scenes. He advises the president and maintains a high profile though various newspaper columns.

Right-hand man...Vilanova

Talent...Begiristain

TXIKI BEGIRISTAIN
Former player in the "Dream Team" and now sporting director, responsible for scouting and signing new players.

CARLES PUYOL
Club captain and a hugely important symbol of the club's Catalan heritage.

Symbolic...Puyol

On target...Messi scores away at Malaga

player, Guardiola could not have been more of a hero. And yet few were calling for him to be made Barcelona coach. For many, the choice was clear: Jose Mourinho.

Although he had just led Barcelona B to promotion, it was Guardiola's first year as a coach. They said he was too young, too inexperienced, too much of a risk. They were wrong.

"The people who say Pep is inexperienced are idiots," insists one of his closest collaborators. "Guardiola was a coach when he was a player.

"Experience is not things happening to you, it is seeking solutions, thinking about things, analysing them, challenging yourself. Pep has always been tremendously active in that sense."

World's best player

Barcelona already had the players: Andres Iniesta, Xavi and Eto'o would grace any side, and Leo Messi is surely the world's best player right now. Last season Guardiola privately expressed the opinion that the first-team squad was so good that all it would take would be to get them working, hungry again and fully fit for Barcelona to be a decent side. It looked a tall order. But Guardiola – charismatic, intelligent, and young enough to understand his players – has managed exactly that.

Bad influenec...Deco (left) and Ronaldinho were shown the door by Guardiola

Those he thought he could not win over were jettisoned. He got rid of Deco and Ronaldinho – two of the players considered most guilty of cruising and, given their charisma and importance within the squad, extending that lax attitude to others. Ronaldinho stood accused of missing over 50 per cent of the club's training sessions. Guardiola also wanted to sell Eto'o but, despite failing to do so, it has not been a problem. The issue with Eto'o was that he is conflictive, not that he lacks commitment.

Videos and tactical analyses made a return, as did motivational techniques,

> **The people who say Pep is inexperienced are idiots. Guardiola was a coach when he was a player**

too. With the exception of Martin Caceres and Sylvinho, the entire squad has played decent minutes in an attempt to fully integrate everyone in the project.

After a difficult first season, Thierry Henry was reassured that he had a role to play, Eidur Gudjohnsen was persuaded to stay, and a frustrated Yaya Toure was told that he would be in the side as soon as he was properly fit and he should forget about Arsenal.

Guardiola was as good as his word – just as he was when he listened to his squad's complaints over long trips away. Barcelona no longer oblige their players to spend the night before home games in a hotel. The trade-off is good behaviour, intensity and focus.

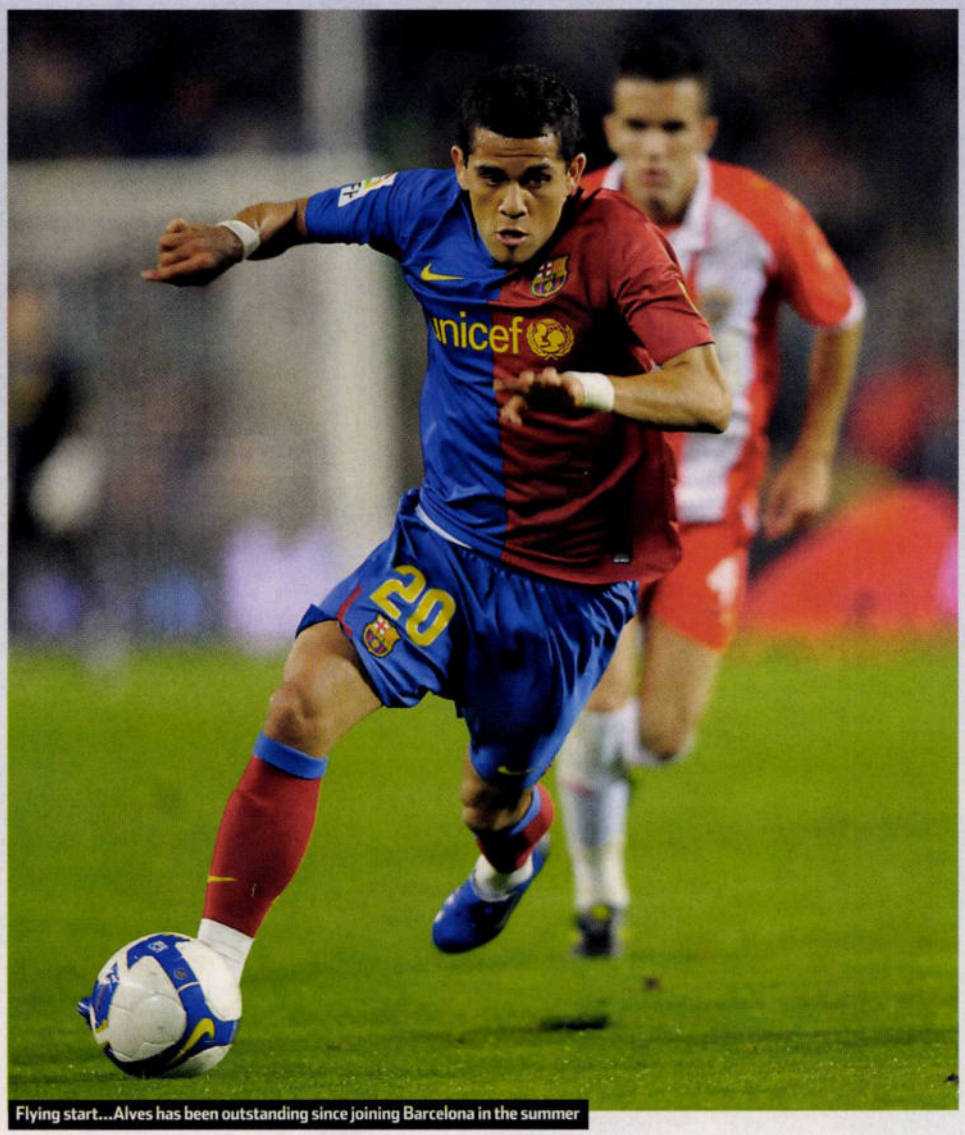
Team spirit...even bit-part players like Gudjohnsen don't feel left out

That intensity is increased with the element of surprise. In press conferences, Guardiola always but always talks up the players that the press does not. In the dressing room he keeps his players concentrated and on their toes, invariably making points they do not expect.

That intensity is also palpable on the pitch. Barcelona play extremely high, suffocating the opposition. Quite remarkably, the front line of Messi, Henry and Eto'o have committed more fouls this season than centre-backs Carles Puyol,

as Guardiola brought in a new code of conduct that was designed to push professionalism and foster fraternity, making collective and individual responsibility the key. He introduced, and imposed, a £500 fine for anyone who did not arrive early enough to have breakfast with the rest of the squad, £1,000 for anyone not at home by midnight, and £6,000 for every minute a player was late to training. Humility is the word and Guardiola, acutely aware that the side had become satiated on success, barely ceases insisting that Barcelona "have not won anything".

Privately, he spoke to his players



Flying start...Alves has been outstanding since joining Barcelona in the summer

Rafael Marquez and Pique. What that means is they are winning the ball back quickly and in dangerous positions, and having it at the feet of their most dangerous men. Meanwhile, the central midfielders are encouraged to dash beyond the strikers. Xavi is on course for his best-ever goals tally, while Keita and Gudjohnsen have also weighed-in with decisive late runs.

Intensity also applies to the coach. Guardiola is never silent, constantly cajoling his players, always trying to help correct mistakes. He hones in on the smallest details but the idea is the key. Results breed confidence, sure, but the players have to be committed to the model first and foremost. Conviction is everything.

Barcelona and Guardiola are steeped in the Cruyff school, and there is an iron commitment to quick passing and attacking, possession football which, of course, suits the players at Guardiola's disposal – players, like him, who are cut from the classical Barcelona mould.

Quality and quantity

In the short term, good results in lieu of good performances are not allowed to interfere with the search for Guardiola's football – a search that will, the coach believes, ultimately lead to good results. Quality and quantity will ultimately be one and the same.

Guardiola has bemoaned performances after thumping victories and then talked up his team after draws. When Barcelona lost to Numancia on the opening day, his complaint was not with the scoreline but the fact that the team had not done what he had asked them to do. His assistant Tito Vilanova described the 1-1 draw with Racing – one of only three games in which Barcelona dropped points – as their best display.

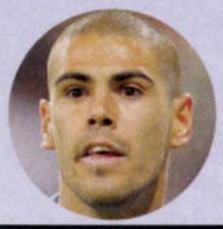
Alongside Vilanova, Guardiola has the team working harder than ever before. Leo Messi's continued fitness, for the first time in four years, is testimony to that, and the Argentinian has been phenomenal this season. But more importantly, he has them working smarter too. He had to tell Seydou Keita to stop running so much and Dani Alves to concentrate his phenomenal efforts in specific areas.

The identity and the concept is crystal clear; the courage of Guardiola's conviction unsheakable. He is tireless in his battle to make it equally unshakeable for his players. With each new victory, every festival of goals, the model – Barca's model – becomes more reinforced. With each victory, the title that already appears to be in the bag draws closer.

Mourinho might have been the first choice for many, but the stats don't lie: Pep Guardiola's Barcelona have been breathtakingly brilliant all season.

He's back...Henry is enjoying himself after a frustrating first season in Spain

GOALKEEPERS



1 Victor VALDES

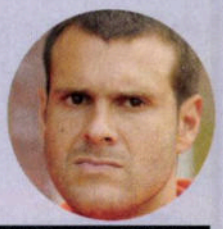
Born 14.01.82

First-choice keeper who made his Barca debut in 2002 after working his way through the club's youth and reserve teams. Dubbed the "Catalan Casillas" but has yet to have the same impact. Still to be capped by Spain but has made several appearances in exhibition matches for Catalonia.

13 Jose Manuel PINTO

08.11.75

Reserve keeper signed in January 2008. Started out in the youth team at Real Betis, then spent 10 years at Celta Vigo.



25 Albert JORQUERA

03.03.79

Product of Barca youth system who has played second fiddle to Valdes and now has Pinto as a rival.

DEFENDERS

2 Martin CACERES

07.04.87

Uruguay international centre-back who was signed from Villarreal for £15.5m in summer 2008. Signed by Villarreal from Defensor in 2007, but spent the 2007-08 season on loan at Recreativo.

3 Gerard PIQUE

02.01.87

Central defender who played for Barca's youth team but signed his first pro contract at 18 with Manchester United. Made a few appearances for United, then spent the 2006-07 season on loan at Real Zaragoza. Joined Barca in a £7m deal last summer.

4 Rafael MARQUEZ

13.02.79

Arguably the most successful Mexican footballer playing abroad. A vastly experienced centre-back who has been capped more than 80 times by his country. Started out at Atlas and joined Barca from Monaco in 2003 for £4.5m. Can also play in defensive midfield.

MIDFIELDERS

6 XAVI

25.01.80

Central midfielder who is the nearest Barca have to Guardiola's successor. At the club since aged 11, he was one of the outstanding players at Euro 2008 and was voted Player of the Tournament. Brilliant at linking the play, he was once nicknamed "Humphrey Bogart" because he plays it again (and again).

8 Andres INIESTA

11.05.84

One of the most underrated players in world football, the Barcelona-bred all-rounder is known as "El anti-*galactico*" because of his modesty and willingness to play anywhere.

15 Seydou KEITA

16.01.80

Mali international who made his name in France at Lorient and Lens before moving to Sevilla in 2007, where a highly successful season earned him a £13m move to Barcelona last summer.

FORWARDS

7 Eidur GUDJOHNSEN

5.09.78

Iceland international who has been in and out of the team since joining from Chelsea in 2006. Began his career as a second striker but has increasingly been used in midfield. Once replaced his father Arnor as a substitute in an international against Estonia.

9 Samuel ETO'O

0.03.81

Cameroon international who almost left Barca in the summer but could not get anybody to accept his wage demands. African Footballer of the Year in 2004, 2005 and 2006. Signed by Real Madrid as a 15-year-old. Later joined Mallorca, who sold him to Barca in 2004.

10 Lionel MESSI

24.06.87

The undisputed king of Barcelona. Signed by Barcelona from Newell's Old Boys when he was 13 after the club agreed to fund treatment for a hormone deficiency, thus bypassing international laws on the transfer of under-18s.

"With each victory, a title that already appears to be in the bag draws closer"

COACH

Josep "Pep" GUARDIOLA

18.01.71

Spent 11 years as a player at Barcelona. Took over as coach in May 2008.

5 Carles PUYOL

13.04.78

Shaggy-haired centre-back who leads by example. Club captain, born and bred in Catalonia, who made his debut in 1999 and has now made more than 400 appearances in all competitions for the club. Can also play at full-back.

16 SYLVINHO

12.04.74

Brazilian left-back who was displaced at Arsenal by Ashley Cole and moved to Celta Vigo in 2001. After three seasons at Celta, he joined Barca in 2004 and has cemented his reputation as an overlapping wing-back, though not always as a regular starter.

18 Gabriel MILITO

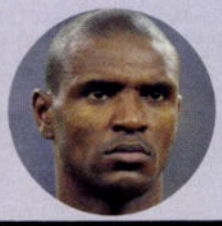
07.09.80

Argentinian centre-back who was due to join Real Madrid from Independiente in 2003 until a medical uncovered a knee injury, though it was also claimed he was a victim of club politics and was not considered a big enough *galactico*. Joined Real Zaragoza instead, then signed by Barca in 2007 for £19m.

20 Daniel ALVES

06.05.83

Flying right-back who has excelled at Barca since his summer 2008 transfer from Sevilla. Was keen to join Chelsea in summer 2007 but Sevilla rejected their bids. Now a regular for Brazil and a member of the 2007 Copa America-winning side.



22 Eric ABIDAL

09.11.79

French international left-back who joined Barca from Lyon in summer 2007 in a £14m deal. Has also played at centre-back.

21 Aleksandr HLEB

01.05.81

Belarus international who joined from Arsenal in last summer for £11.8m but has not been a regular starter. Previously with Stuttgart. Right-sided or central attacker.

24 YAYA TOURE

13.05.83

Ivory Coast international who plays in the holding midfield role. Arrived at Barcelona in summer 2007 from Monaco after a roundabout route (ASEC Abijdan, Beveren, Metalurh Donetsk and Olympiakos). Now a regular after being linked with a move away last summer. Brother of Arsenal defender Kolo.

28 Sergio BUSQUETS

16.06.88

Son of former keeper Carles Busquets, has been at the club all his career. Capped by Spain at Under-21 level.

11 BOJAN Krkic

28.08.90

Born in Catalona to a Serbian father and a Spanish mother. Blazed a trail through Barca's youth teams before making his senior debut aged 17 years and 19 days in September 2007.

14 Thierry HENRY

17.08.77

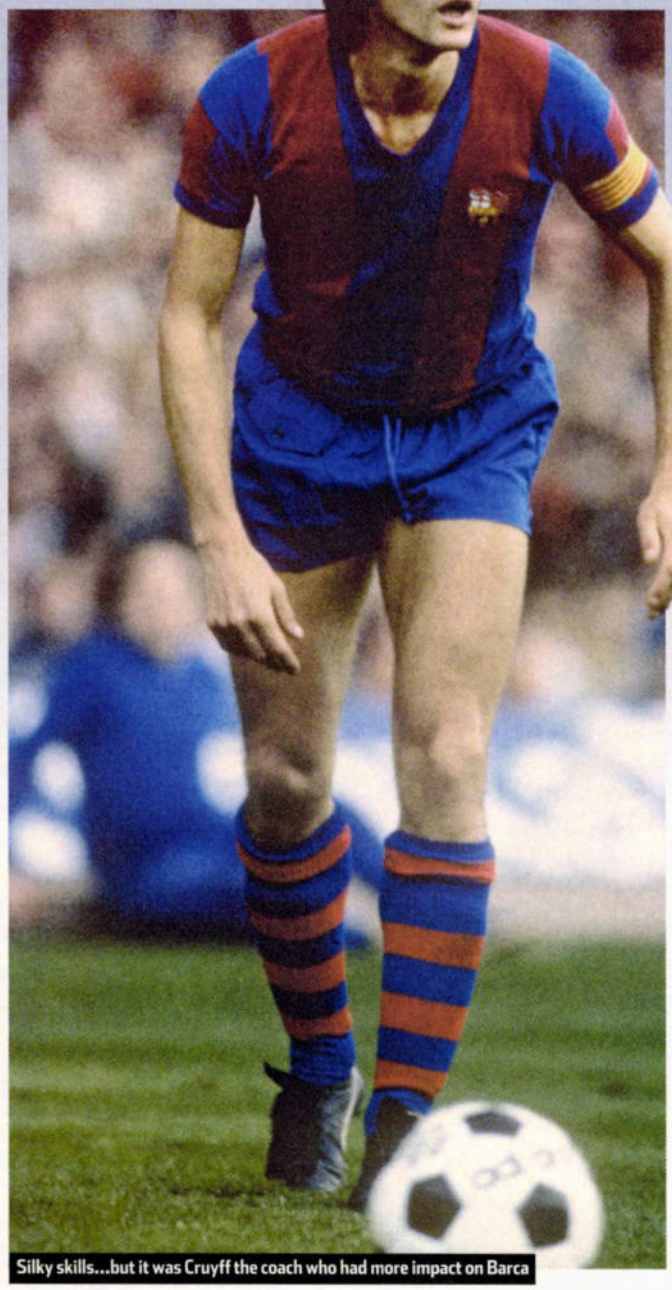
The French international striker took his time adapting to life in Barcelona following his summer 2007 move from Arsenal but still finished last season as the club's top scorer with 19 goals.

Role model...Xavi is the man who makes Barcelona tick

The history

ONLY ONCE in their history have Barcelona put together a sequence of more than two league title triumphs in a row. That was the "Dream Team" put together by Johan Cruyff and which won La Liga in four successive seasons from 1991 to 1994.

Five times Barcelona have put together two-in-a-row sequences, the first span being in the 1947-48 and 48-49 seasons.



Silky skills...but it was Cruyff the coach who had more impact on Barca

Coach then was Uruguayan Enrique Fernandez, who shocked the players, including the newly arrived goalkeeper Antonio Ramallets, with the amount of training demanded.

The rewards were there for all to see at terms ends, however. Barcelona were unbeaten at home over both campaigns and ended up three points and two points, respectively, clear of double runners-up Valencia. Stars of an all-Spanish team were right winger Estanislao Basora and centre-forward Cesar Rodriguez (one of the four highest-scoring forwards in Spanish league history).

Icing on the cake was winning the Latin Cup, the end-of-season precursor to the European Champions Cup. Barcelona thrashed Reims 5-0 in the semi-finals and edged Sporting Lisbon 2-1 in the Final in Madrid, Basora opening the scoring.

Two blank seasons followed before, in 1951, the ambition and potential of Barcelona's football was changed for ever by the arrival of the exiled Czech-Hungarian centre-forward Ladislav (Lazslo) Kubala, whose talent and achievements mark him down as one of the greatest players of all time.

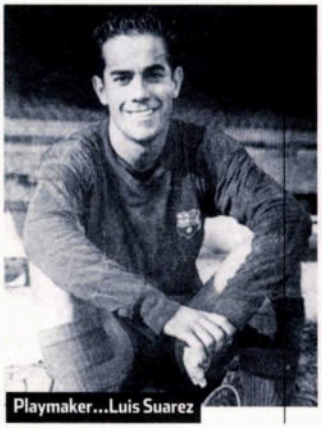
When Hungary became a communist state in 1949, Kubala fled under a tarpaulin on the back of a lorry. Initially he sought a new club in Italy but in vain. When he moved to Spain the government and football federation resisted demands from Hungary he be banned for life (a gesture ignored by Barca fans in a fury at high-level aid for Real Madrid in signing Alfredo Di Stefano).

League record

Barcelona did the league and cup double in both of Kubala's first two seasons, 1951-52 and 1952-53. They scored a league record 92 goals first time and 82 in his second term. Bilbao (by three points) and Valencia (two) were the runners-up.

Indeed, in the 1951-52 season the all-conquering Catalans

> **"Kubala escaped Hungary under a tarpaulin on a lorry. When he arrived in Spain the government resisted demands he be banned for life"**



Playmaker...Luis Suarez

High stakes...the 1958 Fairs Cup Final against London S

boys

Current coach Pep Guardiola is a key figure in Barcelona's rich heritage. Keir Radnedge details the teams and players who have lit up the club's past

Chasing glory...Kubala takes on Hamburg in the 1961 European Cup semi-final

Kings of Europe...Cruyff's 1992 squad

claimed no fewer than five trophies. Under the guidance of Ferdinand Daucik, Kubala's father-in-law, they also carried off two sponsored trophies plus the 1952 Latin Cup. Juventus were beaten 4-1 in the semi-finals and Nice 1-0 in the Final in the Parc des Princes in Paris.

Four years later the Parc would host the first Champions Cup Final but by then Barcelona (and Kubala) had been overthrown in Spain by Real Madrid (and Di Stefano).

Barcelona responded by quitting the old Las Cortes for Nou Camp, signing a string of foreign stars and placing them under the command of Helenio Herrera, the most controversial coach of his era.

Herrera, a former France full-back, was born in Morocco and brought up in Buenos Aires. He guided Barca to back-to-back league titles in 1959 and 1960 although that was not enough to save him from the sack after defeat by Madrid in the 1960 European Cup semi-finals.

Barcelona bookended a turbulent two years with victories in the first two editions of the Inter-Cities Fairs Cup (now the UEFA Cup). A London Select and then Birmingham City were easy victims in the two-leg Finals of 1958 and 1960 respectively.

Mighty squad

Herrera's squad was mighty indeed, featuring Spain defenders such as Fernando Olivella and Sigi Gracia; half-backs Juan Segarra, Enrique Gensana and Martin Verges; plus playmaking inside-forward Luis Suarez. Then there were the imported Kubala, Paraguayan Eulogio Martinez, Uruguayan Ramon Villaverde, Brazil's Evaristo de Macedo and further exiled Hungarians in Sandor Kocsis and Zoltan Czibor.

In 1958-59, remarkably, they scored a further record 96 goals and conceded a mere 27 in 30 games. They pipped Madrid both times: by four points in 1959 and by head-to-head results in 1960 after finishing on level terms.

Despite reaching the European Cup Final for the first time in 1961 – they were beaten 3-2 by Benfica in Berne – Barcelona then turned up a domestic cul-de-sac. Even the arrival of world-record signing Cruyff in 1973 for £922,000 could not inspire multiple titles.

Cruyff's return as coach, however, was a different matter entirely. The greatest era in the club's history saw those four-in-a-row titles with triumphs in the European Cup, Cup-winners Cup and Super Cup along the way.

Cruyff's creed was deceptively simple and made for superb football. The further from their own goal Barcelona defended, he reasoned, the safer they were and the more danger they would create. He also structured a tactical shape which depended on using the full width of the pitch – one reason England striker Gary Lineker found himself exiled to outside-right.

Inspiration came from Michael Laudrup, Romario, Hristo Stoichkov and Ronald Koeman with an outstanding supporting cast including a young Catalan midfielder named Pep Guardiola. Barcelona won the Spanish Cup in 1990.

Barcelona's *cules* hoped for a return to the Dutch-inspired Dream days under Louis Van Gaal in the late 1990s and then Frank Rijkaard. But doubles in 1998-99 and 2005-06 were not enough to satisfy. The legend of Kubala and the trophies of Cruyff were too much to match.

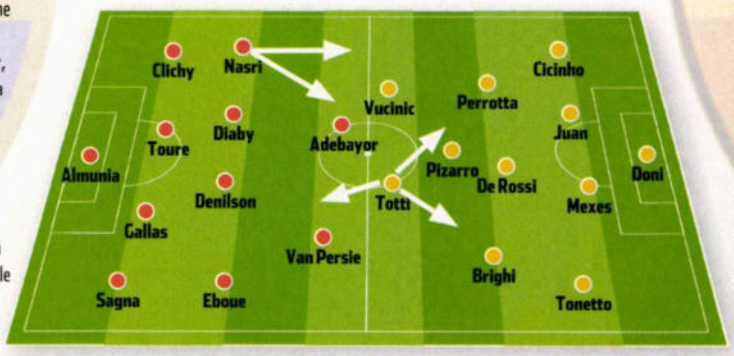
What price, then the gloom or glory awaiting Guardiola?

Arsenal v Roma

Feb 24: Arsenal-Roma
Mar 11: Roma-Arsenal

HOW THEY LINE UP

Injuries have restricted the options available to manager Arsene Wenger, but his side will still play a fast, fluid, short-passing game that has been criticised for over-elaboration. Youngsters Aaron Ramsey, Jack Wilshere and Carlos Vela could all be called on, while striker Eduardo is returning from a long injury lay-off.



Coach Luciano Spalletti has plenty of options in attack, where Francesco Totti drops deep and drifts wide. David Pizarro, Jeremy Menez and Rodrigo Taddei can fill the 1 in a 4-3-1-2, and Julio Baptista can play a central striking role. Options are more limited at the back, where John Arne Riise's injury leaves a gap at left-back.

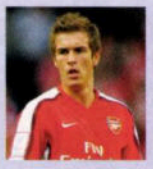
THE SEASON SO FAR

● Troubled. The Gunners have been pushed out of the Premier League top four by Aston Villa and suffered injuries to key men Cesc Fabregas, Theo Walcott and Tomas Rosicky. William Gallas being stripped of the captaincy for public criticism of his team-mates and a looming boardroom battle have only compounded matters. New signing Andrei Arshavin cannot play in the Champions League.

● Roma struggled for form early on, losing their Champions League group opener at home to CFR Cluj of Romania. But it all changed on November 4 when Chelsea arrived at the Olympic Stadium and were soundly beaten 3-1. That proved a major turning point and they have not looked back. The dream of playing the Champions League Final in their own stadium on May 27 remains a tantalising possibility.

HITS

● The conveyor belt of Arsenal youngsters keeps producing, with Jack Wilshere, Aaron Ramsey (right, signed from Cardiff), Carlos Vela (from Mexico) the latest to make the first team.



● Montenegrin striker Mirko Vucinic (left) has been a huge success, scoring a great goal against Chelsea, while Matteo Brighi, a disappointment at Juventus, has thrived in Rome. Daniele De Rossi remains the crucial cog in Roma's midfield, winning tackles and placing passes.

MISSES

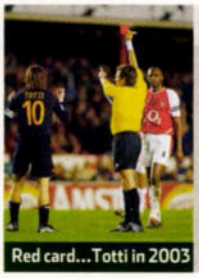
● Emmanuel Eboue (right) has upset fans with some poor performances but, with Walcott injured, Wenger has few other options on the right of midfield. Gallas threatens to be a loose cannon, while Emmanuel Adebayor has not hit the heights of last season.

● Roma remain over-dependant on Francesco Totti, who has struggled with injury again this season. Christian Panucci has been frozen out by Spalletti. Brazilian keeper Doni (left) remains less than convincing.

WHAT THE COACH SAYS

● Arsene Wenger: "Roma are a technical side, they play a lot like Barcelona, so it's a very even tie. Now it becomes a different competition. Form on the day makes a big difference. Before if you had one bad day you could make it up but that's all changed. If you have five bad minutes out of 180 you will be out."

● Luciano Spalletti: "I'm glad we'll face Arsenal. We are a team who need great games in order to play our best football and Arsenal are among the best-organised clubs in the world."



Red card...Totti in 2003

FLASHBACK

March 11, 2003

Francesco Totti is sent off at Highbury in the second-phase group B match. Totti and Christian Panucci are the only survivors on either team from that night, which was the last time the clubs met in the Champions League.

RECENT RECORD

ARSENAL	ROMA
2000 1st group stage	2000 Did not qualify
2001 Quarter-finals	2001 Did not qualify
2002 2nd group stage	2002 2nd group stage
2003 2nd group stage	2003 2nd group stage
2004 Quarter-finals	2004 Did not qualify
2005 Last 16	2005 1st group stage
2006 FINALISTS	2006 Did not qualify
2007 Last 16	2007 Quarter-finals
2008 Quarter-finals	2008 Quarter-finals

Atletico Madrid v Porto

Feb 24: Atletico-Porto
Mar 11: Porto-Atletico

It's unclear whether new coach Abel Resino will change Javier Aguirre's 4-4-2 formation but, as a former goalkeeper himself, he's likely to end his predecessor's policy of rotating keepers Leo Franco and Gregory Coupet.

HOW THEY LINE UP

When Ferreira is sure of his ground – usually at home – he goes with a 4-3-3. For potentially perilous away trips, he may opt for 4-5-1 or 4-1-2-3. Whatever the system, the midfield elements hold the key: Lucho's flair for strategy, Meireles' dynamism and Fernando's selflessness.

THE SEASON SO FAR

● Atletico made a promising start and despite being thrashed at Camp Nou by Barcelona and losing at home to Real Madrid they recovered to go 15 matches unbeaten in the run-up to Christmas. But dreadful form after that prompted the sacking of coach Javier Aguirre and his replacement by former Atletico goalkeeper Abel Resino.

● It was no mean feat to top a group in which Arsenal were favourites to dominate. On the home front they are still the reference, the team everyone else fears the most. Autumnal reverses, at home to Leixoes and at Naval, are now out of their system.

HITS

● In an underperforming side there have been few star performers, but Uruguay striker Diego Forlan (right) and Portugal wide man Simao have impressed with their consistency.

● Prolific Argentina striker Lisandro Lopez and Uruguay wide man Cristian Rodriguez, who is more incisive than during his days at Paris Saint-Germain. Bruno Alves (left) remains a rock at the back, while Lucho calls the shots in midfield, aided by the very effective Fernando.

MISSES

● Holland defender Johnny Heitinga (right) has so far failed to live up to his reputation. A number of players have been accused of fuelling dressing-room tensions, particularly between the Spanish and Argentinian camps, which Aguirre failed to deal with.

● Pedro Emanuel (left) is a centre-back by trade. So why play him as a square peg in a round hole at left-back? On the opposite flank, right-back Cristian Sapunaru has his limitations and is likely to be replaced by Jorge Fucile.

WHAT THE COACH SAYS

● Abel Resino: "We need to turn things around so that the players believe again. At this moment the team is not in good shape. We need to analyse the situation then see what we can do."

● Jesualdo Ferreira: "I'm optimistic but respectful about facing Atletico Madrid. We are a club very at home in the Champions League and this experience will, I believe, be crucial."

Future Atletico star...Futre

FLASHBACK

May 27, 1987

Paulo Futre was in the Porto team that won their first European Cup, when they beat Bayern Munich 2-1 in Vienna. He would later go on and play for Atletico Madrid. Following Porto's second competition win in 2004, Maniche and Costinha made the same move to Atletico.

RECENT RECORD

ATLETICO	PORTO
2000 Did not qualify	2000 Quarter-finals
2001 Did not qualify	2001 3rd qual rnd
2002 Did not qualify	2002 2nd group stage
2003 Did not qualify	2003 Did not qualify
2004 Did not qualify	2004 WINNERS
2005 Did not qualify	2005 Last 16
2006 Did not qualify	2006 1st group stage
2007 Did not qualify	2007 Last 16
2008 Did not qualify	2008 Last 16

Chelsea v Juventus

Feb 25: Chelsea-Juventus
Mar 10: Juventus-Chelsea

HOW THEY LINE UP

Without long-term injury casualty Michael Essien, Chelsea's midfield dynamism has been severely dented, especially as teams have quickly cottoned on to coach Scolari's tactic of using full-backs Jose Bosingwa and Ashley Cole to add width to attacking moves. Nicolas Anelka is preferred to Drogba in the lone striker role.

Juve are a solid, hard-running side that perhaps lack a touch of finesse, something that is occasionally provided by the evergreen Alessandro Del Piero. Such an approach makes them a tough nut to crack.

THE SEASON SO FAR

● Mixed. Owner Roman Abramovich is reported to have lost a fortune in the global banking crisis and appears to be losing interest in Chelsea, where spending has been curtailed. Coach Luiz Felipe Scolari has insisted that he is happy with his squad, but Wayne Bridge was sold to Manchester City in January, with only Ricardo Quaresma brought in on loan from Internazionale.

● Excellent in Europe; solid but showing signs of weakness at home. The highlight so far has been the comprehensive home-and-away wins over Real Madrid in the Champions League group stage. Injuries to key players have hampered their chances of domestic success, with defender Giorgio Chiellini and midfielder Christiano Zanetti the latest to be sidelined.

HITS

● Time and again, Frank Lampard (right) has saved Chelsea with his late runs from midfield. Jose Bosingwa has added pace and dynamism to Chelsea's right flank.

● Amauri (left) has been Juve's star performing forward, while Del Piero has weighed-in with crucial free-kicks. Italy Under-21 defender Paolo De Ceglie has emerged this season, while Claudio Marchisio and Marco Marchionni have shone in midfield.

MISSES

● Didier Drogba (right) has been unsettled by speculation linking him with a transfer to Italy, where former coach Jose Mourinho has expressed a desire to re-employ him. Deco made a bright start but has since been hampered by injuries. Petr Cech has been vulnerable at set pieces.

● Injuries have restricted the contributions of experienced campaigners Mauro Camoranesi, Zanetti and Gianluigi Buffon, and how long can 36-year-old Pavel Nedved (left) keep making his lung-busting contributions?

WHAT THE COACH SAYS

● Luiz Felipe Scolari: "I do not feel under pressure. It is not a problem in my life. I laugh when I win but sometimes we lose. In this competition if you have five bad minutes out of 180 you will be found out."

● Claudio Ranieri: "I don't want revenge on Roman Abramovich because I can only thank him. I can't forget my four years at Chelsea. We will see two good games. It will be a fascinating clash. It will be useful for the Italian teams to meet English sides so we can see how we stand up alongside them."

Victory for Vialli...1996 triumph

FLASHBACK

May 22, 1996

Gianluca Vialli and Didier Deschamps celebrated Juventus winning the 1996 Champions League Final against Ajax. Four years later, Vialli was manager and Deschamps a player as Chelsea won the FA Cup Final at Wembley, against Aston Villa.

RECENT RECORD

CHELSEA	JUVENTUS
2000 Quarter-finals	2000 Did not qualify
2001 Did not qualify	2001 1st group stage
2002 Did not qualify	2002 2nd group stage
2003 Did not qualify	2003 FINALISTS
2004 Semi-finals	2004 Last 16
2005 Semi-finals	2005 Quarter-finals
2006 Last 16	2006 Quarter-finals
2007 Semi-finals	2007 Did not qualify
2008 FINALISTS	2008 Did not qualify

Internazionale v Manchester Utd

Feb 24: Inter-Man Utd
Mar 11: Man Utd-Inter

HOW THEY LINE UP

Despite speculation that new coach Jose Mourinho would field an expansive 4-3-3 with wingers, Inter have settled on a more functional 4-3-1-2, with Dejan Stankovic as the key playmaker and Esteban Cambiasso in defensive midfield. Brazilian full-backs Maicon and Maxwell provide the width.

Alex Ferguson has plenty of options but tends to play 4-4-2 with a dual strike force rotated between Dimitar Berbatov, Wayne Rooney and Carlos Tevez. Alternatively, Cristiano Ronaldo and Ryan Giggs can play a more a central role, or further forward on the flanks in a 4-3-3.

THE SEASON SO FAR

● Despite leading Serie A from the off, Inter have not displayed any sort of form that suggests they can progress in the Champions League knockout stages, for which they qualified despite losing at home to group winners Panathinaikos.

● So far, so good. Despite injuries to key players and taking time out to compete in the Club World Cup in Japan, United were top of the Premiership at the start of February.

HITS

● Right-back Maicon (right) has been the outstanding player for Inter, while Mourinho has praised Swedish forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic as the best player in the world. Esteban Cambiasso is a crucial figure in central midfield.

● Rafael (left), the Brazilian teenager, has emerged quicker than expected to challenge for the right-back slot, while his twin Fabio has also come into contention at left-back. Edwin Van der Sar set a new Premier League record after going 12 games without conceding a goal.

MISSES

● Summer signings Ricardo Quaresma (right) who was packed off to Chelsea on loan, and Mancini have been a huge disappointment. Adriano has continued his personal tussle with authority, while Patrick Vieira and Cristian Chivu have been injured.

● Gary Neville is in danger of losing his place to Rafael. Owen Hargreaves (left) and Patrice Evra are long-term injury casualties, while Anderson has also been sidelined.

WHAT THE COACH SAYS

● Jose Mourinho: "I'm pretty sure the San Siro will be sold out for the first leg and it will be an exciting night for us all. I have lived memorable moments in my career against that team, and like the idea of going back to Manchester. It's right to see matches between two strong teams at this stage of the competition."

● Alex Ferguson: "It'll be interesting to come up against Jose again. He's a character with a good personality and I've always got on well with him. He knocked us out of the competition when he was at Porto, so I hope we have the luck they had in that tie this time round."

Jig of joy...Mourinho at Old Trafford in 2004

FLASHBACK

March 9, 2004

The last time Jose Mourinho took a club to Old Trafford in the Champions League he was rewarded with a 90th-minute equaliser by Costinha that gave Porto a 3-2 aggregate win. He enjoyed the moment.

RECENT RECORD

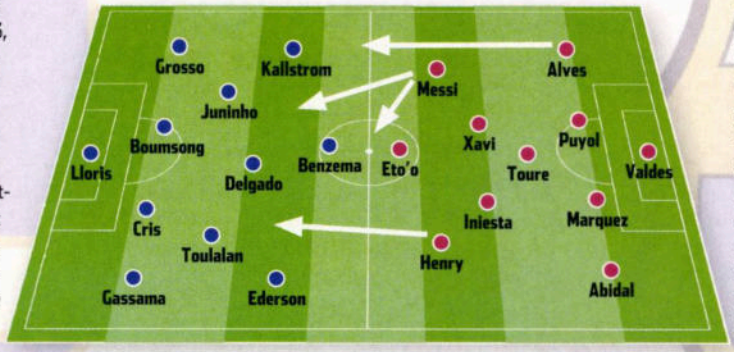
INTER	MAN UTD
2000 Did not qualify	2000 Quarter-finals
2001 3rd qual rnd	2001 Quarter-finals
2002 Did not qualify	2002 Semi-finals
2003 Semi-finals	2003 Quarter-finals
2004 1st group stage	2004 Last 16
2005 Quarter-finals	2005 Last 16
2006 Quarter-finals	2006 1st group stage
2007 Last 16	2007 Semi-finals
2008 Last 16	2008 WINNERS

Lyon v Barcelona

Feb 24: Lyon-Barcelona
Mar 11: Barcelona-Lyon

HOW THEY LINE UP

Coach Claude Puel would claim he employs a 4-3-3, yet for large periods of a game 4-5-1 is the order of the day. No prizes for guessing that Lyon will play on the counter against Barca. With right-winger Sidney Govou out injured, they lose a large chunk of their width; the full-backs do not venture forward very often.



Attack, attack, attack. Pep Guardiola's side will play high up the pitch and use right-back Dani Alves as an auxiliary attacker, with the Brazilian's forays forward enabling Argentina's brilliant Lionel Messi to drift inside. Yaya Toure will provide midfield cover in front of the back four, with Xavi and Andres Iniesta further forward.

THE SEASON SO FAR

● Top dogs in France for the past seven years, Lyon are not nearly as omnipotent this term, with Bordeaux, Paris Saint-Germain, Marseille and a few others on their tail. Apart from star striker Karim Benzema, they have been toothless in attack and creativity is not their strong suit. Whispers from the dressing room give the distinct impression many of the squad are not happy with Puel's defensive approach.

● In a word: brilliant. The goals have flowed, and so has the praise. Pep Guardiola, in his first season as a head coach, has shown no signs of buckling under the pressure. Instead, he has turned Barca into Europe's most exciting team.

HITS

● Benzema (right). He is the morning, noon and night of the Lyon goal threat. Has the strength and skill to plough a loan furrow but needs more support. Defensive midfielder Jeremy Toulalan is exceptional in his ball-winning and distribution. Hugo Lloris has looked a fine prospect between the posts.

● Daniel Alves (left) has been in exceptional form since his summer switch from Sevilla and is probably the second-best player in La Liga this season, after Lionel Messi. Thierry Henry has been reborn after a difficult first season in Spain following his 2007 switch from Arsenal.

MISSES

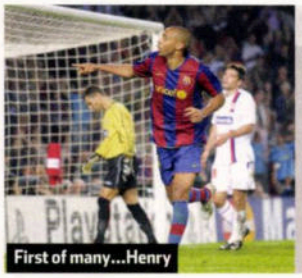
● So influential in the past, Brazilian schemer Juninho (right) is fading fast. At left-back, Fabio Grosso looks a shadow of the player who helped Italy win the World Cup in 2006. Lyon have not been spared by injuries: Govou, full-back Francois Clerc and midfielder Mathieu Bodmer all have problems.

● Very few, if indeed any. Even those players who are left out – such as Eidur Gudjohnsen (left) – have been made to feel part of the squad.

WHAT THE COACH SAYS

● Claude Puel: "Barca are the in-form team in Europe at the moment. There should be no problem motivating my boys. We're the outsiders, but not at all without hope. Our response to their superstars will be a collective one."

● Pep Guardiola: "It has been a good first half of the season. We have lots of points, have only lost once [in the League] and scored lots of goals. It's a pleasure to work with these players."


First of many...Henry

FLASHBACK

September 19, 2007
Thierry Henry celebrates scoring his first-ever goal for Barcelona in their 3-0 win against Lyon in the group stage of last season's competition. He struck in the 90th minute.

RECENT RECORD

LYON	BARCELONA
2000 3rd qual rnd	2000 Semi-finals
2001 2nd group stage	2001 1st group stage
2002 1st group stage	2002 Semi-finals
2003 1st group stage	2003 Quarter-finals
2004 Quarter-finals	2004 Did not qualify
2005 Quarter-finals	2005 Last 16
2006 Quarter-finals	2006 WINNERS
2007 Last 16	2007 Last 16
2008 Last 16	2008 Semi-finals

Real Madrid v Liverpool

Feb 25: Real Madrid-Liverpool
Mar 10: Liverpool-Real Madrid

HOW THEY LINE UP

Arjen Robben's directness from the left flank provides Madrid's biggest threat while the addition of Lassana Diarra provides a solid midfield base. Coach Juande Ramos wanted a new right-sided midfielder but may stick with Wesley Snejder in preference to loan signing Julien Faubert.

Rafa Benitez is a naturally conservative coach who likes to play with two holding midfielders. The departure of Robbie Keane leaves Liverpool more dependent than ever on Fernando Torres, but the 4-2-3-1 formation allows Steven Gerrard to play in his most effective role, behind the main striker.

THE SEASON SO FAR

● Uninspired in Europe, unsettled and troubled by injuries at home. Ramos was the surprise temporary replacement for Bernd Schuster, sacked for suggesting Madrid could not beat Barcelona at Camp Nou. He has steadied the ship, but January signings have been a mixture of the good (Lassana Diarra), the bad (Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, cup-tied in Europe) and the bizarre (Julien Faubert, on loan from West Ham).

● Confusing. Liverpool have matched Manchester United in setting the pace in the Premier League without completely convincing. Off the pitch, the row between American co-owners Tom Hicks and George Gillett has had a destabilising effect, while the signing and selling of Keane did not do Benitez any good in his bid for a new contract and more control over transfer policy.

HITS

● Arjen Robben (right), a revelation in recent weeks since returning from injury, and Raul, who has equalled Alfredo Di Stefano's club goalscoring record.

● Despite the distraction of a pending court case, Steven Gerrard (left) remains crucial to Liverpool's fortunes, both through his on-pitch leadership and his knack of scoring vital goals. However, he has been out of action recently after tearing his left hamstring in the FA Cup defeat against Everton.

MISSES

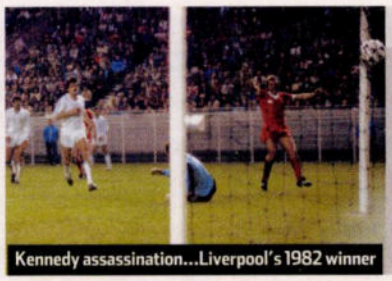
● Somewhat unfairly, the fans have been on the back on Dutch youngster Royston Drenthe (right), even though Gabriel Heinze's declining form has been of greater concern, while the injuries to Ruud Van Nistelrooy (out for the season), Pepe and Mahamadou Diarra have been keenly felt.

● Spain's success at Euro 2008 has taken its toll on the fitness of Fernando Torres, who still does not look match sharp. Liverpool took a financial hit on the sale back to Tottenham of Robbie Keane, who did not fit into Benitez's preferred formation.

WHAT THE COACH SAYS

● Juande Ramos: "Injuries have already had an effect on the backbone of the team. It is clear that we are not shining like Barcelona, but we are picking up results at the moment. Liverpool were one of the strongest teams we could have faced but they are similar in strength to us."

● Sammy Lee (Benitez assistant): "Whoever we were going to get, it was always going to be a difficult tie. I can't put words into Rafa's mouth, but what I can say is that it's a mouth-watering tie for everybody concerned."



Kennedy assassination...Liverpool's 1982 winner

FLASHBACK

May 27, 1981

Alan Kennedy scores the winner in the 82nd minute as Liverpool beat Real Madrid 1-0 in Paris to win their third European Cup. It was the last meeting of the two clubs in the competition.

RECENT RECORD

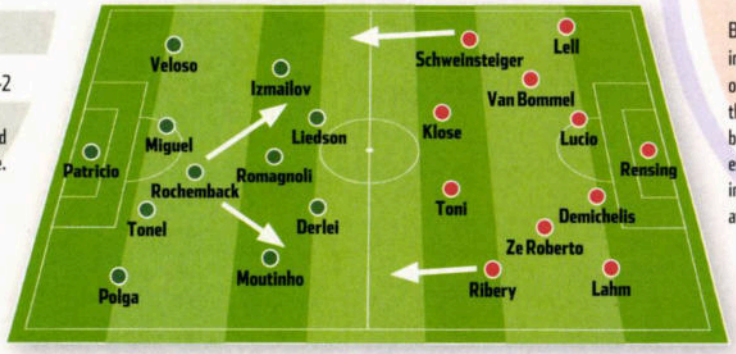
REAL MADRID	LIVERPOOL
2000 WINNERS	2000 Did not qualify
2001 Semi-finalists	2001 Did not qualify
2002 WINNERS	2002 Quarter-finalists
2003 Semi-finalists	2003 1st group stage
2004 Quarter-finalists	2004 Did not qualify
2005 Last 16	2005 WINNERS
2006 Last 16	2006 Last 16
2007 Last 16	2007 FINALISTS
2008 Last 16	2008 Semi-finalists

Sporting Lisbon v Bayern Munich

Feb 25: Sporting v Bayern
Mar 10: Bayern v Sporting

HOW THEY LINE UP

Paulo Bento has alternated between a straight 4-4-2 with a diamond midfield, 4-3-1-2 featuring Moutinho or Romagnoli in the hole and this, his current favourite. Izmailov tends to hold a wide position, while Moutinho tucks in. Rochemback originates many attacks, spraying the ball around.



Bayern do not score highly in terms of tactical nous or organisation. Defensively they need to be drilled better. They get by essentially thanks to their individual class in the attacking-third.

THE SEASON SO FAR

● The Lions are far from out of the Portuguese championship race, within striking distance of both Porto and Benfica. Coach Paulo Bento is a meticulous organiser of a defence and must be proud that his side conceded only eight goals in the first 16 games of the season. They did benefit from a favourable group-phase draw, hardly taxed by Shakhtar Donetsk or Basle.

● While the Germans were near-perfect in the group phase, remaining unbeaten and winning all but two of their games, the widely-expected total domination of the Bundesliga has not happened. Defeat at Hamburg on the first weekend back after the winter break proved that coach Jurgen Klinsmann still has a lot to do to turn them into the "dream team" that certain media types prematurely called them.

HITS

● Predatory goalscorer Liedson, although he may be ring rusty following a recent knee injury. The outstanding all-round game of midfielder Joao Moutinho (right), who can make the play and put in overtime as a ball-winner. Ever-improving young keeper Rui Patricio.

● The marksmanship of strikers Miroslav Klose and Luca Toni allied to the excellent left-sided triumvirate of creator Franck Ribery (left), midfield Mr Do-it-all Ze Roberto and attacking full-back Philipp Lahm. Ribery is absolutely indispensable. Without him, Bayern sink into mediocrity.

MISSES

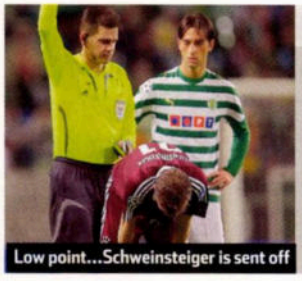
● Portuguese international Miguel Veloso (right) has lost his place as defensive midfielder to returning Brazilian Fabio Rochemback. Bento has used Veloso at left-back but does he have the pace for this role? Neither Derlei or Helder Postiga has convinced as Liedson's partner.

● Whoever plays at right-back (Christian Lell or Massimo Oddo) does not inspire. In goal, Michael Rensing, young successor to Oli Kahn, lacks authority. Prolific Germany striker Lukas Podolski (left) is now fourth-choice after Klose, Toni and Landon Donovan and counting the days to a summer return to Koln.

WHAT THE COACH SAYS

● Paulo Bento: "No question that Bayern are big favourites. But with the right mixture of pride and discipline, we can make life complicated for them."

● Jurgen Klinsmann: "Drawing Sporting is good news for us. We've avoided many potentially tricky opponents. But we must not underestimate them for a second. Portuguese football is very competitive and they know how to produce capable youngsters."


Low point...Schweinsteiger is sent off

FLASHBACK

October 18, 2006

These two clubs met in the Champions League two seasons ago. Bastien Schweinsteiger scored the only goal of either of their two group B encounters in the 19th minute in Lisbon. Unfortunately, 28 minutes later he received a second yellow card for a foul on Sporting's Djalo, and played no further part in the action.

RECENT RECORD

SPORTING LISBON	BAYERN MUNICH
2000 Did not qualify	2000 Semi-finals
2001 1st group stage	2001 WINNERS
2002 Did not qualify	2002 Quarter-finals
2003 3rd qual rnd	2003 1st group stage
2004 Did not qualify	2004 Last 16
2005 Did not qualify	2005 Quarter-finals
2006 3rd qual rnd	2006 Last 16
2007 1st group stage	2007 Quarter-finals
2008 1st group stage	2008 Did not qualify

Villarreal v Panathinaikos

Feb 25: Villarreal-Panathinaikos
Mar 10: Panathinaikos-Villarreal

HOW THEY LINE UP

Wide men Robert Pires and Santi Cazorla provide the invention in Manuel Pellegrini's 4-4-2 formation, with Marcos Senna and Sebastian Eguren in central midfield. Giuseppe Rossi is the main man in attack, partnered by Joseba Llorente or, if he returns from a knee injury in time, Turkey international Nihat.

Henk Ten Cate has experimented with different shapes but a counter-attacking 4-3-2-1 has produced the best results. The three midfield enforcers provide defensive insurance, while Cleyton and Giorgos Karagounis have to support Evangelos Mantzios as much as possible. The drawback? It is very narrow.

THE SEASON SO FAR

● Villarreal have been disappointing in La Liga, where defeats to Barcelona, Real Madrid and Sevilla have left them struggling to repeat last season's impressive second-place finish. In the Champions League, they came through a modest group without excelling against Celtic and Aalborg, and notching 0-0 draws with Manchester United.

● A tale of two competitions – exploits in Europe, where they won in a blaze of glory away to Werder Bremen and Internazionale; indigestible fare in the Greek championship. Twelve points adrift of leaders Olympiakos in late January, they have no chance of the title and such under-achievement brings a deafening roar of discontent from the fans. Never the best of environments to perform in.

HITS

● Giuseppe Rossi (right), the American-born Italy international striker has continued to shine since his move from Man United in July 2007.

● Striker Mantzios (left) has been largely off target domestically but came up with three vital Champions League goals, all against Bremen. He is also the team's best player with his back to goal, adept at holding the ball up intelligently. The unsung centre-back pairing of Ioannis Goumas and Josu Sarriegi.

MISSES

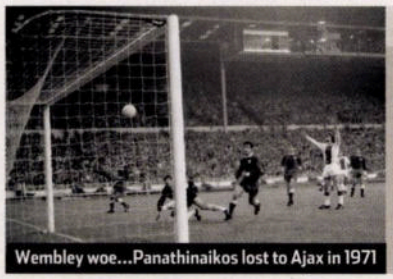
● Marcos Senna (right), one of Spain's outstanding players at Euro 2008 last summer, has struggled to live up to his growing reputation this season. American teenager Jozy Altidore has been sent on loan to second division Xerez after failing to get a game.

● Supposed boy wonder attacker Sotiris Ninis, who coach Ten Cate does not seem to trust. They will badly miss defensive midfielder Alex Tziolis, who took the high road to Bremen in the transfer window. The set pieces of Giorgos Karagounis (left) have been below par this season.

WHAT THE COACH SAYS

● Manuel Pellegrini: "We would have liked to have been at home in the second leg, but we'll take this draw. Panathinaikos surprised people in the group stage and could do so again if we do not respect them."

● Henk Ten Cate: "The way we came back to qualify for the last 16 after losing our first two matches shows the character here. The wins in Inter and Bremen indicate that we are never more dangerous than when we have a big challenge."



Wembley woe...Panathinaikos lost to Ajax in 1971

FLASHBACK

June 2, 1971

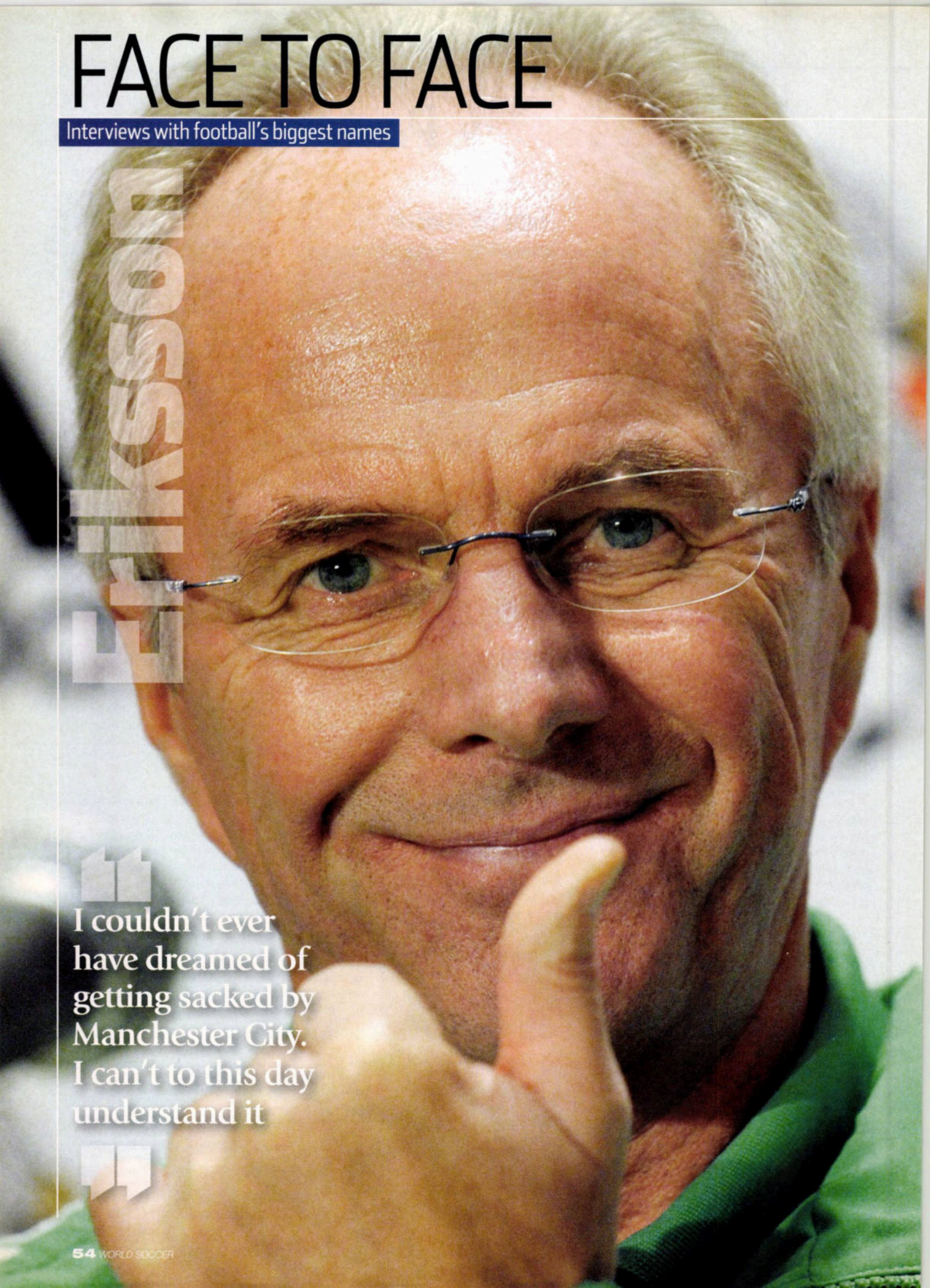
The only previous occasion that either of these teams has reached the Final was in 1971 when Panathinaikos, coached by Ferenc Puskas, lost 2-0 to Ajax at Wembley. Goals from the Dutch entertainers Dick Van Dijk and Arie Haan sealed the win. The closest Villarreal got to the Final was in 2006 when they lost to Arsenal in the semi-finals.

RECENT RECORD

VILLARREAL	PANATHINAIKOS
2000 Did not qualify	2000 Did not qualify
2001 Did not qualify	2001 2nd group stage
2002 Did not qualify	2002 Quarter-finals
2003 Did not qualify	2003 Did not qualify
2004 Did not qualify	2004 1st group stage
2005 Did not qualify	2005 1st group stage
2006 Semi-finals	2006 1st group stage
2007 Did not qualify	2007 Did not qualify
2008 Did not qualify	2008 Did not qualify

FACE TO FACE

Interviews with football's biggest names



Eriksson

"I couldn't ever have dreamed of getting sacked by Manchester City. I can't to this day understand it"

Now and Sven

The Swede talks frankly about his time in England and his philosophy as a coach

YOUR FIRST CLOSE encounter with English football was almost 30 years ago wasn't it. As manager of IFK Gothenburg, you were invited to Liverpool.
Yes, I love the custom where the manager from the visiting team is invited into the boot room after the match. I remember the first time the Liverpool manager told me: "Sven, you are welcome as a guest. It is not a common practice to invite strangers, but it is important for you to remember there is only one rule: you are not allowed to speak about the match we have just seen. You can talk about whatever you want, soccer, politics, religion, but you must not talk about the game." I loved that.

That was an innocent introduction to English football compared to your time as England manager.
I remember when I read the book *The England Managers: The Impossible Job*. It was about all the managers of the England team – and everyone was fired!

The toughest moment must have been when the *News of the World* fooled you, your agent and a lawyer in Dubai with the "fake sheikh" sting...
It was the straw that broke the camel's back from the English FA's point of view. Of course, I regret what happened, but half of what the newspaper wrote was lies. At the time I told my lawyer and agent that it doesn't matter how much it costs: sue them and make sure that I win. It almost got to court, but then the paper came out and said that I would get the money I asked for, that they would pay all legal costs, they would give me an apology and do an interview with me. I said OK to everything, but no to the interview. It took some additional weeks, but I got it all without having to do the interview. I gave away the money to charity. Regarding the love affairs, [the papers] had the stories served on a plate. As far as I know one of the ladies – through a book deal, Sky TV and newspapers – made between half a million and one million pounds.

Are you planning to write a book yourself?
I have been offered so much money – several years' salaries – to write a book, but I don't want to do that.

How did you cope with your home being surrounded by paparazzi?
I didn't care about them. My driver would arrive and I just walked out to the waiting car, pretending they were not there.

How did you handle the headlines with the national team players?
I had to call the ones mentioned in the "fake sheikh" story and talk to them. The first scandal with a love affair appeared when the team was already assembled. I just told the players that I was sorry if it disturbed them with the attention to my private life. "Boss, welcome to England," they laughed. They were all used to it.

How was your time between the national team and Manchester City?
It was shit, to be honest.

Was it your worst period in life?
Yes. Since 1976, when I first started out as a coach, I had never been unemployed, never been sacked. I have never been so restless in all my life.

So it must have been a big relief when you got the Manchester City job?
Yes it was. I am not prepared to not be working, it was a disaster. I hadn't had a single thought to retire.

So, at 59 years old, you coached your first Premier League team...
Everything was very fast there; it was fast in and fast out. But it was a good year and for me it was a big adventure to be able to compete against the best teams. Up to Christmas we were among the three or four best teams, but after that the season was too long for most of the players. We had too many who weren't used to playing in the Premier League. They played well but in the end they collapsed.

So you had higher goals for City?
If you had asked me that question a year ago, I couldn't ever have dreamed of getting sacked. I can't to this day understand it. But the owner just had something in his head – to have another coach. But that's life. Life continues in a good way. I really like it in Mexico, but I also had a great time with Manchester City.

How was it discussing football with the owner, Thaksin Shinawatra?
It was alright, but the difficult thing was that he didn't know anything about soccer. He believed it was easy, but then he also had his personal problems back in Thailand.

How was the chemistry with Thaksin?
Great, 100 per cent. He said just after sacking me: "Sven, I love you." And I actually still believe it was from his heart.

You are also a good friend of Roman Abramovich. Does he understand soccer?
Absolutely, and when he invested in Chelsea it lifted up the entire Premier League. The money went round and around.

Is there any threat to the Premier League with the new kind of owners and all the money they have?
No. There must have been the same talk 25 years ago, that the limit is reached and soccer can't manage any more. When I signed for Lazio, let's say I owed 100. When I left them I had 600, and the reason was because of the TV rights.

The sum of £4m has been mentioned as your salary for the England team.
It is not true, it was less. But not much less.

And in Mexico, how much do you earn?
Less, but I can't complain.

Where do you invest all your money? What is your philosophy?
Nothing, I have no idea, I have no clue how much money I have got. My broker called me some years ago and said: "Sven, I have never

had a client like you. The stock market has crashed, and it has gone up again, and the last time you called me was a year ago."

So you haven't called him now when the market has plunged worse than ever?
Not at all. [Mexico assistant manager and close friend] Tord Grip's daughter said: "Money is not everything, but of course it is better to cry in a limousine than in a bus!"

You were already a professional coach when you had a family. Were you there for them?
Probably not.

Have your children or your ex-wife ever complained?
No, but I believe that it could have been the reason for our divorce. To be married to a soccer coach is not easy.

Is it true you had trouble sleeping until Norwegian sports psychologist Willi Railo taught you how to relax?
I learned a kind of technique. I can just sit here and fall asleep. It takes 25 seconds.

So you always sleep well?
Always, but not the night after a match. Then it is impossible to relax, there is too much adrenaline in my body.

Down and out...Eriksson's England side lost to Portugal on penalties in the quarter-finals of the 2006 World Cup

Game plan...Eriksson has World Cup qualification in mind

The use of a sports psychologist – was that important for you and the teams?
I used Willi at my first club, Degerfors, and at Gothenburg and with Lazio, and it worked very well.

What could a sports psychologist have done for England in the last World Cup? Could he have saved you from losing out on penalties?
It is about focus, especially if you are not the usual penalty taker. A sports psychologist would have taught the players to decide beforehand where to place the ball, to create a focus so you can discard the hundreds of millions who are looking at you on TV when you are walking that short distance from the centre circle to the penalty spot. How many thoughts are going through a player's head during that walk? I regret I didn't have a sports psychologist for the England team.

What are your good qualities?
If I am good at anything it is creating a good atmosphere, either with a soccer team or somewhere else.

What is your secret?
To maintain yourself, to trust people, to give them confidence. It is, of course, always important to be able to listen to people. That is more important than to talk. I believe in creating a climate where players can come forward with their own suggestions: where to stay, how to travel, training and tactics. If you can get that you have come far. It is important to use players who have been around for a long time; it would be stupid to not use their experience. You can never tell yourself that you know everything, that you have all answers.

If a player has played a bad match, how do you speak to him?
I ask him to come to my office. What do you do to a son who has done something he shouldn't? Do you pull him by the ear and give him a slap around the face, or do you sit down and tell him he can't behave like that? When it comes to club football, if the problems persist, you would sell the player; if it's for a national team, you wouldn't call him up any longer. It is a little bit more difficult with a son – you don't sell him!

Is it difficult to handle all the stars?
No. Of course, there are many stars, but every player really wants to play soccer. They love to train, they like to play for 5,000 or 100,000 spectators, and they all want to win. But there is one word that is most important when you are in collective sports. And that word is "respect". For the groundsman, the cleaning ladies, for the drivers, for the team captain, for the coach and for the doctor. The same respect for everyone.

Do you think you will be taking Mexico to the World Cup in South Africa next year?
For me personally, and for Mexico, it is a must. If not I will be fired, and that would be the right thing for them to do. ●

Interview by Toby Selander

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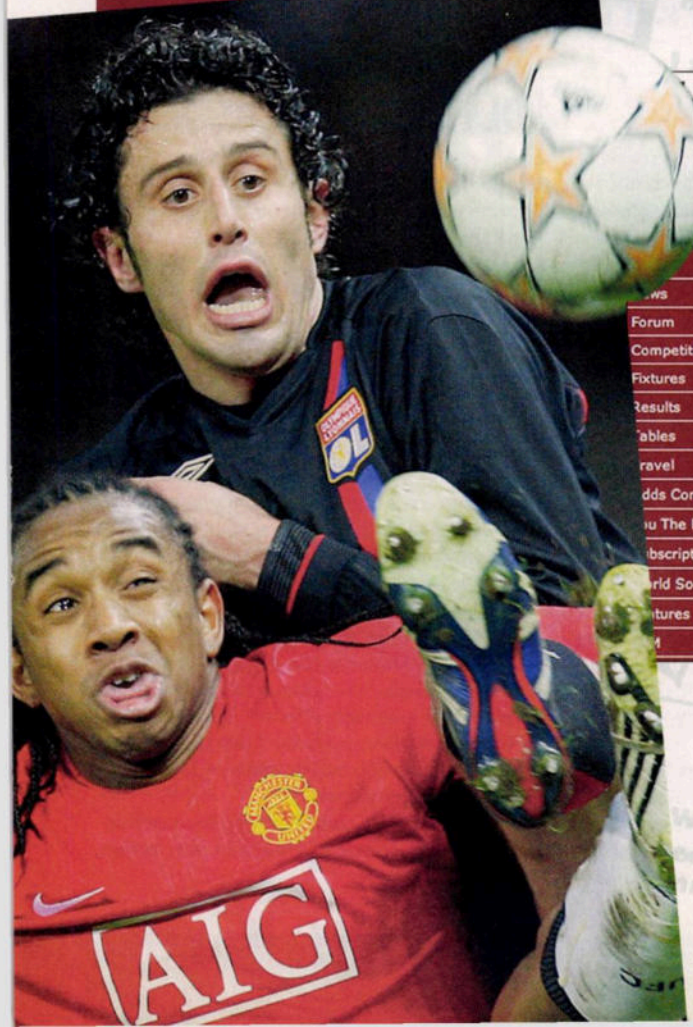

- Daily dispatches from World Soccer correspondents
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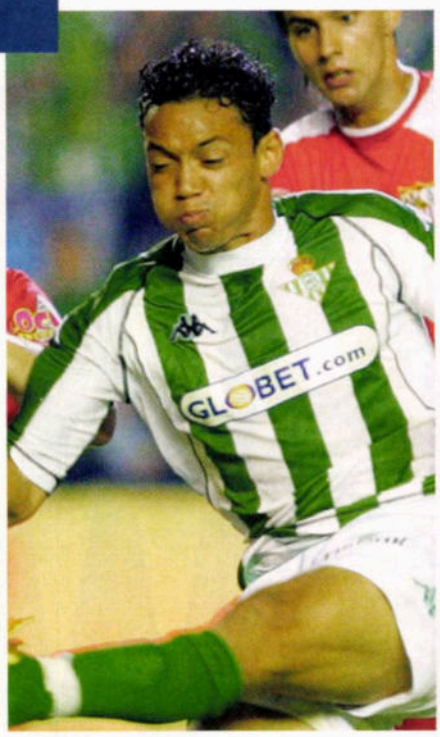
SIX OF THE BEST JANUARY

Matt Derbyshire
BLACKBURN ROVERS TO OLYMPIAKOS

A NUMBER OF Olympiakos supporters were reported to be less than impressed on hearing their club had signed the 22-year-old striker on a six-month loan. Piraeus pulses had quickened following rumours of swoops for Leverkusen's Greece international attacker Fanis Gekas (who is now at Portsmouth) and Mexico marksman Nery Castillo, so news that the Greek Super League leaders had instead gone for Blackburn's fourth-choice forward was bound to incite some disappointment.

Although Derbyshire is by no means a like-for-like replacement for the retiring Darko Kovacevic, a closer examination of the Lancastrian's credentials should reassure those fans. He has performed most ably for England's Under-21s and whenever he has played for Blackburn he has cut the figure of an extremely sharp penalty-box operator.

In fact, the argument could be made that the Blackburn-born Derbyshire does not deserve his lowly position in the Ewood Park goalscoring roster, behind Roque Santa Cruz, Jason Roberts and Benni McCarthy. In the English Premier League the home-grown do tend to come a distinct second to the big buys. Which is a shame.



Ricardo Oliveira
REAL ZARAGOZA TO REAL BETIS

IN AN ATTEMPT to keep their heads above La Liga relegation waters, Betis have chosen to re-employ Brazilian striker Oliveira as a lifeguard. Indeed, Betis president Manuel Ruiz de Lopera was so keen to seal the deal with second division Zaragoza that he persuaded his bank to open on a Saturday afternoon so he could make the necessary arrangements.

Clearly nostalgia for the good old days was the spur for the move. During his first spell in the green-and-white stripes, Oliveira was a rip-roaring success, netting 22 league goals as the Andalucians clinched a fine fourth place in the 2004-05 season and scoring in the Copa del Rey Final victory against Osasuna. Unfortunately, the highs did not last. Oliveira was sidelined with a knee-ligament injury the following autumn, went on loan to Sao Paulo, fell out with the Betis management over the terms of his recall and eventually left in a huff for Milan, where he made little impact.

Meanwhile, Zaragoza fans are far from happy. Not only has their main man slipped out of town, the club has made a significant financial loss on a player who cost £8million last year. Ouch.

Brandao
SHAKHTAR DONETSK TO OLYMPIQUE MARSEILLE

MARSEILLE HAD NO choice but to look for front-running reinforcements after Senegal international Mamadou Niang broke a foot towards the end of last year. But with many of their initial targets either unwilling to sign or simply too expensive, OM plumped for a double-headed alternative: they brought in old-timer Sylvain Wiltord, on loan from Rennes, and the Brazilian Brandao, who cost £6million from Shakhtar Donetsk.

The 28-year-old Brandao may have spent some time studying biology at university and hail from a country which is renowned for producing attackers of finesse, but there is certainly nothing intellectual or refined about his style of play. What he does bring to the table, however, is bags of physical presence, boundless energy, decent aerial power and a blunt instrument in the shape of his deadly left foot. Despite the absence of frippery, he can also be extremely effective. Since joining Shakhtar in 2002, from Sao Caetano in his homeland, he notched 65 goals in 139 Ukraine League games.

OM boss Eric Gerets has long been calling out for more muscle up front and now, at last, he has just that.

DEALS

Nick Bidwell selects the most intriguing moves from the winter transfer window

Ola Toivonen

MALMO TO PSV EINDHOVEN

MORE THAN THREE decades after the exceptional Swedish front man Ralf Edstrom played a prominent part in winning two Dutch League titles for PSV Eindhoven (1975 and 1976), compatriot Toivonen is hoping to achieve similar success at the Philips Stadium following a £4million move from Malmo.

Edstrom and Toivonen have much in common. Both hail from the central Swedish town of Degerfors and turned out for the local club; both founded their reputations on being able to play up front or in an attacking midfield role; and each possesses a decent touch for someone with a tall build.

Edstrom, though, was far more experienced than his 22-year-old fellow countryman when he arrived at PSV. While Edstrom was a fully fledged international, Toivonen – who, as his name suggests, comes from Finnish stock – has just three full caps to his name, the first of which came in January 2007 against Venezuela.

Toivonen, whose fierce shooting brought him 15 goals in the 2008 campaign for Malmo, was also rumoured to be on the wanted list of a number of English clubs, but it was PSV who got their man.

Giampaolo Pazzini

FIORENTINA TO SAMPDORIA

DURING HIS FOUR years at Fiorentina, Giampaolo Pazzini's performances rarely lived up to the hype that had accompanied his signing and this season he could do no better than fourth in the *Viola*'s front-line hierarchy, behind Adrian Mutu, Alberto Gilardino and Stevan Jovetic.

It was time to move on and a £9million transfer to Sampdoria, with Emiliano Bonazzoli heading in the opposite direction on loan, should give Pazzini the chance to re-establish his early credentials as an Italian golden boy.

The 24-year-old will be expected to form a deadly duo up front with the mercurial Antonio Cassano and help lift the club away from the lower reaches of Serie A. What Samp really need is the Pazzini who hit a glorious hat-trick for Italy Under-21s against England in the inaugural game at the new Wembley in March 2007.

In many ways the move is make or break, though Pazzini is showing no sign of fear. The proof? He has chosen to wear the No10 shirt that was worn with such distinction in the 1980s and 90s by Roberto Mancini. No pressure then.

Savio Nsereko

BRESCIA TO WEST HAM UNITED

ONLY A FEW days before West Ham smashed their transfer record by paying Serie B side Brescia £9.2million for the young German attacker, one of the 19-year-old's agents was furiously denying rumours that his client was bound for the Premier League. "England is not our first option for the development of Savio," insisted Dieter Heimen. "We would prefer Italy or Germany."

It now transpires Heimen was kept out of the loop but the truth is that Nsereko, born in Uganda but raised in Germany, was always a good bet to take the inside track to London. West Ham sporting director Gianluca Nani once held a similar job at Brescia and he is the former son-in-law of the Lombardy club's president, Gino Corioni. Furthermore, he brought the then 16-year-old to Brescia from 1860 Munich in 2005.

Many will view such a large outlay on a teenager playing in the Italian second division as very risky business. But Horst Hrubesch, the respected coach of Germany's youth team, thinks differently and says: "Savio is not only outstanding technically but performs with a great deal of aggression and tracks back diligently."

URUGUAY The country in depth – the state of the game, club-by-club guide, movers and shakers

Haunted by the

South Africa awaits...Diego Forlan goes to take a corner during Uruguay's 6-0 victory over Peru in their 2010 World Cup qualifier

BRIAN HOMEWOOD in Montevideo

past

Uruguayan football continues to be weighed down by comparisons with its illustrious history

Magic moment...Uruguay beat Argentina 4-2 in the first World Cup Final in 1930

FOR A DEVELOPING country with a population of only 3.3 million people, Uruguay punches well above its weight in international football, regularly giving larger neighbours Brazil (180 million) and Argentina (45 million) a run for their money.

The national side qualified for the 2002 World Cup finals, were unlucky to miss out on 2006 after losing on penalties to Australia in a play-off, and are well-placed to claim a berth in South Africa.

But, for all this, Uruguayan football is generally considered to be in perpetual decline. To the exasperation of national coach Oscar Tabarez, nearly everyone – from local fans to foreign media – insists on comparing the current side to the teams from the first half of the last century.

"There's a saying that Uruguay is not part of football history, it is part of football's pre-history," says Tabarez. "The ordinary fans just want us to win, and they often compare it to 1924, 1928, 1930 and 1950. My message to them is simple: 'The world has changed since then.'"

After growing prosperous on wool and meat exports, Uruguay was the first country in South America to introduce the welfare state and was also a pioneer on the football pitch.

Turning up as virtual unknowns at the 1924 Olympic Games, the Europeans had no answer to their short-passing game and Uruguay won the tournament. Four years later, they repeated the feat.

Uruguay also did more than any other country to turn the World Cup into a reality. While countries such as England remained in snotty isolation, Uruguay organised and hosted the inaugural World Cup in 1930, building the 100,000-capacity Centenario stadium especially for the event. The Centenario remains the country's biggest venue to this day,

although it is now sadly run-down.

Uruguay won the 1930 tournament but, angry at the meagre European turnout for the tournament (only five teams made the transatlantic journey), they refused to take part in 1934 and 1938. When the World Cup resumed in Brazil in 1950 following the Second World War, Uruguay were back and pulled off one of the biggest shocks in the game's history when they beat the hosts 2-1 in the Final, the so-called *Maracanazo*.

But the glory years effectively ended four years later in Switzerland. Having destroyed Scotland 7-0 in a group game, Uruguay were beaten by Hungary in the semi-finals – their first-ever defeat at a World Cup.

After that, Uruguayan football began to coast downhill, rather like the country's once-proud welfare system which, mainly because of a bloated bureaucracy, became too costly to sustain.

As other nations caught up with their footballing technique, Uruguay were overtaken by the pack and, with such a small population, found themselves struggling to compete at the very highest level.

They responded by adopting a defensive approach, often with liberal amounts of gamesmanship thrown in. They were still difficult to beat but it was rarely pretty to watch. The style was nicknamed *Garra Charrua*, which adds the Spanish word for "guts" to the name of the warrior-like Indians who inhabited the country before the Spanish arrived.

Dominant force

At this stage, Uruguayan club sides were still a dominant force and when the Libertadores Cup was created in 1960, Penarol won the first two editions and added a third title in 1966. Over the course of the next 22 years, they won it twice more, with Nacional winning the trophy three times. Both teams also lifted the Intercontinental Cup three times.

But, by 1988, European clubs had begun snapping up South American players in droves and this, combined with Uruguay's tiny internal market, crippled the clubs.

While Uruguay continues to export a huge number of players abroad today, the national team is making an admirable effort to shed its reputation for dirty play.

"There's an image which, regrettably, the world has had of us and we have struggled hard to change this, to play a clean game, to change our way of playing," admits Tabarez.

"So it hurts us a lot when, after the smallest offence by a Uruguayan player, they say we are kickers, that we are animals."

The country's Achilles heel is undoubtedly the domestic game. Most matches are played in tiny stadiums, which resemble European non-league grounds, in front of only a couple of thousand supporters.

After a brief effort to spread the game to the provinces, the league has become effectively a Montevideo championship, with 13 of the 16 teams based in the capital.

In the 2005-06 season, the opening stage of the championship was won by provincial club Rocha, who shared their training pitch with a herd of cattle. One of the cows was adopted as the team mascot and completed the lap of honour with the players after the decisive match.

"It hurts us a lot when they say we are kickers, that we are animals"

Current Uruguay coach Oscar Tabarez defends his players against the country's past reputation for producing dirty, cynical sides

But Rocha soon lost their best players and they are now back in the second division, where they survive on a monthly budget of £5,000 and receive the princely sum of £1,000 per month in television rights.

But while the clubs struggle, one man has become very rich.

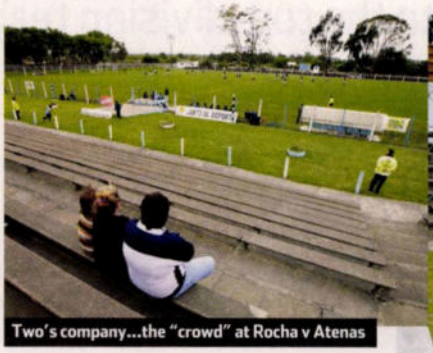
Francisco "Paco" Casal is the agent for nearly all the country's top players and also owns Tenfield – the company which holds television and marketing rights for championship and international games, and in turn owns the GOL TV channel in the USA. It is often rumoured that players can only get into the national side if they have Casal as their agent.

The self-styled richest man in Uruguay, Casal is popular with the players, if not with the Uruguayan tax authorities, who have put him under investigation. When international striker Richard Morales ran into a pay dispute with Malaga in Spain, Casal paid the player out of his own pocket before bringing court proceedings against the Spanish club.

Not surprisingly, most Uruguayans jump at the chance of playing in Europe and last year Jonathan Urretavizcaya, 18, joined Benfica after only 14 games for Montevideo side River Plate.

"This tendency is growing stronger

Big clash...Gerardo Alcoba of Penarol put his head in where it hurts against Diego Arismendi of Nacional



Two's company...the "crowd" at Rocha v Atenas

Hard times...provincial club Rocha now play in the second division

and involves younger and younger players, now they take 14-year-olds," says Tabarez. "This tendency to emigrate has become stronger – to the detriment of the standard of the local game. There is a growing difference between the standard of the local game and the demands of international game.

"So we have no choice but to support the players who go abroad, because they are in contact with players of international standards."

Many of the players who move to Europe are then shunted into the reserves. "We try not to exclude them from the national team process," said Tabarez. "For the next Under-20 games, we have managed to bring over two players from Milan and Benfica, even though there is no obligation [on the clubs] to release them.

"It's a way for them to keep improving, to reach international level, and I think their clubs understand this."

Complicated format

Clearly, outside forces are largely to blame for the current situation. But domestic football does little to improve the situation and the championship, which uses an extremely complicated format, has been hit by various episodes of confusion and violence.

In 2005, Defensor Sporting refused to take part in the end-of-season Final against Nacional in protest at a refereeing decision. Defensor had been set to win the title until Nacional finished level on points with them after beating Rocha 3-2 – with a controversial penalty awarded in the fifth minute of injury-time.

The following year, the championship was suspended for a month after a Cerro fan was stabbed and killed in front of his wife and son by Penarol supporters at a bus stop near the Centenario.

Fan violence reared its ugly head again last November when around 200 supporters of Danubio and Nacional fought on the pitch following their teams' top-of-the-table game. Once again, the championship was halted, this time for two weeks.

As in neighbouring Argentina, directors are quick to blame hooliganism on social problems. But when former international Gus Poyet visited the country armed with all the documents he could find on England's experience with hooliganism, nobody showed the slightest interest.

Equally inexcusable was the confusion which surrounded Nacional's game against Villa Espanola in August. Obeying a directive to clamp down on late starts, the referee abandoned the game when Nacional walked out onto the pitch two minutes late and Villa Espanola were awarded a 2-0 walkover victory.

Nacional appealed, but instead of deciding on the matter immediately, the Uruguayan FA sat on it until November, possibly hoping that by then either Danubio or Nacional would be so far clear at the top that their decision would not matter.

That backfired as the pair remained neck and neck, so the FA ordered a replay. But when Nacional's 2-0 win took them one point ahead of Danubio, arch rivals Penarol threatened to pull out of the tournament in protest.

Pitch battle...fans of Danubio and Nacional clashed after a game in November 2008

Despite the domestic game's problems, Tabarez remains full of praise for the natural talent and technique of the Uruguayans. "When we hold the preliminary trials for the Under-15s, we notice that they still play very good football in this country," he says. "What we don't have is the chance to develop them, of having a significant domestic game." ●

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

Penarol, Nacional, Defensor Sporting...a guide to the top-division teams

1 PENAROL
Uruguay's most successful club and, along with Nacional, the most popular. Founded by members of the railways union and originally known as the Central Uruguay Railway Cricket Club, they took their yellow and black colours from Stephenson's Rocket. The club have won a record 36 Uruguayan titles since the championship turned professional in 1932. They have also won the Libertadores Cup five times and the Intercontinental Cup three times. However, badly affected by financial problems, they have not won the League since 2003.

2 NACIONAL
Trailing Penarol by six professional titles, Nacional have won the Libertadores three times, going on to win the Intercontinental Cup on each occasion. The last was in 1988 when they beat PSV Eindhoven on penalties. Since then, Nacional have followed the decline of domestic football in Uruguay, rarely progressing beyond the last 16 of the Libertadores, although they did reach the quarter-finals in 2007.

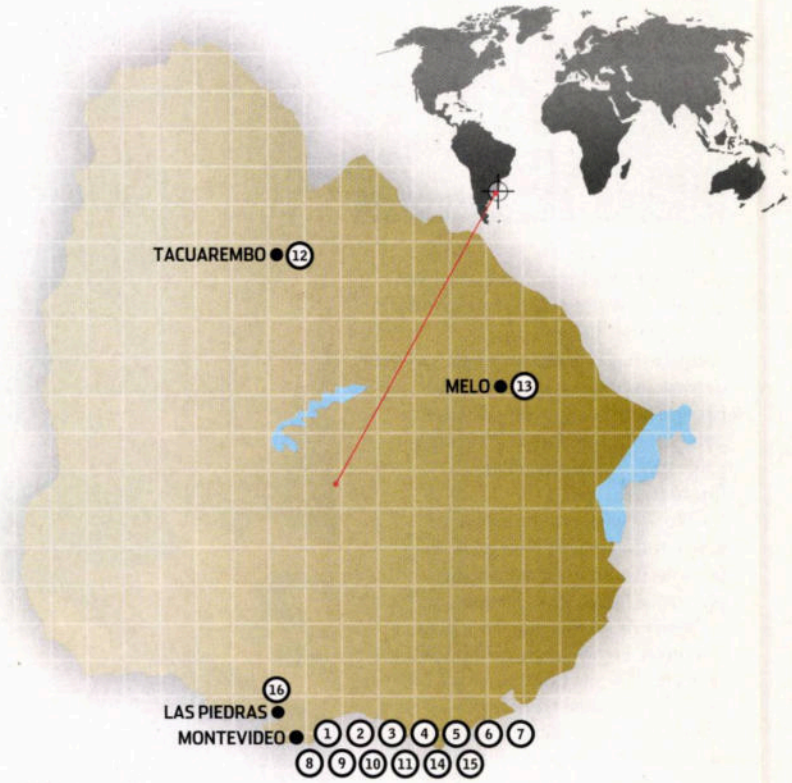
3 DANUBIO
A small club based in the working-class neighbourhood of Jardines del Hipodromo, Danubio are currently one of Uruguay's strongest sides, winning the championship in 2004 and 2006-07. The club is regarded as having one of the best youth policies in the country and has provided players for the national Under-17 and Under-20 teams.

4 DEFENSOR SPORTING
The reigning champions are one of the few clubs in the world whose stadium – the 18,000-capacity Luis Franzini – can claim to have a sea view. Originally known as Club Atletico Defensor, they became Defensor Sporting in 1989 after merging with Sporting Club Uruguay. They are the country's third most successful team with four national titles.

5 LIVERPOOL
Founded in 1915, folklore has it that the club was named after the English port. They play at the tiny Belvedere stadium and have spent most of their history between the first and second divisions.

6 VILLA ESPANOLA
Founded in 1940 as a boxing club and took up football 10 years later. Promoted last season, this is only their fifth season in the first division. They were previously involved in 1998 and 2000, going straight back down each time, and then in 2002 and 2003. They did not play at all in 2005 and 2006 due to financial problems, but were readmitted to the second division last year.

7 WANDERERS
Founded in 1902 by a group of students and named after Wolverhampton Wanderers. Once a major power in Uruguayan football, they won four titles during the amateur days but have declined since the 1950s, although they did qualify for the Libertadores Cup in 2002 and 2008.



8 RIVER PLATE
Enjoyed the best season in their history in 2007-08, finishing level at the top of the closing tournament before losing the play-off 5-3 to Penarol. Several of their players have since left and they have struggled this season. Their stadium is named after goalkeeper Federico Saroldi, who died during a match in 1932.

9 BELLA VISTA
Based in the neighbourhood of the same name, Bella Vista have won one League title (1990), but have taken part in the Copa Libertadores several times.

10 RAMPLA JUNIORS
Spent the 1970s in the second division and were relegated again in 1997. After finishing bottom of the second division in 2002, Rampla were prevented from playing professionally the following year due to financial difficulties. The club were readmitted to the second division in 2004 and they won promotion at the first attempt.

11 CERRO
Founded in 1922, Cerro are a small club who have alternated between the first and second divisions. Their Luis Troccoli stadium is situated in one of Montevideo's roughest neighbourhoods and they have a notorious following of hard-core supporters.

12 TACUAREMBO
Founded in 1999 when the Uruguayan FA made a genuine attempt to promote the game in the interior, Tacuarembo have managed to stay in the top flight ever since and are now one of only three provincial sides in the first division.

13 CERRO LARGO
The youngest club in the first division, founded in 2002. Based in Melo, in the north-eastern department of Cerro Largo on the border with Brazil.

14 CENTRAL ESPANOL
Originally named simply Central, after a cemetery, the "Espanol" was added in 1971 to avoid fusion with another club. Won the championship in 1984.

15 RACING
A small club based in the Montevideo neighbourhood of Sayago. Back in the top flight this season as second division champions after an absence of six years.

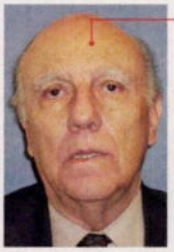
16 JUVENTUD
Based in Las Piedras in the department of Canelones, Juventud spent their early years in regional leagues before joining the third division in 1981. Made their first appearance in the top flight in 1999 and stayed for four years. They were promoted again in 2007.

The movers and shakers in URUGUAYAN FOOTBALL

DIEGO LUGANO
Captain of the national side, his temperament (likeable and articulate off the field, ruthless and belligerent on it) makes him the natural successor to Uruguay's former skipper Paolo Montero, who won four Italian League titles – and received countless red cards – during his career with Juventus. Lugano currently plays for Turkish side Fenerbahce.

HUGO DE LEON
Former defender who won three Uruguayan championships as coach of Nacional (1998, 2000, 2001) despite a row over his coaching credentials.

FRANCISCO 'PACO' CASAL
A former ballboy at the Centenario and a modest professional footballer in his youth, Casal is the most controversial – and arguably the most powerful figure – in Uruguayan football. He works as an agent, representing nearly all of Uruguay's top players, and is also president of Tenfield, which has owned the television and marketing rights for the Uruguayan championship since 1999. Currently under investigation for tax evasion.



JOSE LUIS CORBO
President of the Uruguayan Football Association since 2006, when he replaced Eugenio Figueredo. One of his first promises was to change the format of the national championship so that more clubs from the interior of the country would be able to take part. That is still yet to happen.

RICARDO GABITO
Investigative journalist who enjoys digging up the dirt on Uruguay's football directors, in particular Paco Casal. Author of the book Pacomafia vs DGI [the Uruguayan tax service].

JUAN RAMON CARRASCO
Often known simply as "JR", Carrasco had a truly remarkable 18 months in charge of Uruguay when he tried to turn them into the world's most adventurous team. Known for his rudeness to both his players and the media alike, Carrasco would happily field up to five forwards and would immediately substitute any player who got himself booked for arguing with the referee. His outlandish suits (he stood on the touchline during a World Cup qualifier away to Brazil wearing a bright yellow outfit with wide lapels) added to the overall effect. It all blew up in his face when his side lost 3-0 at home to Venezuela in 2004 and Jorge Fossati was brought in to steady the ship. Now coach of modest River Plate, they briefly enjoyed a spectacular free-scoring run last year but have now gone off the boil. At one game, he walked off the touchline before the end in disgust at his team's performance.

OSCAR TABAREZ
Veteran coach who has been recalled for a second stint at the head of the national team. He was previously in charge at the 1989 Copa America and the 1990 World Cup. Widely-travelled, respected and amiable, he has also coached (among others) Milan, Cagliari, Velez Sarsfield and Boca Juniors.

ENZO FRANCESCOLI
Former Uruguay superstar who won 72 caps, played at two World Cups and won three Copa America tournaments. He is now vice-president of GOL TV, the 24-hour football channel which broadcasts in English and Spanish in the US and is owned by Paco Casal's Tenfield.

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

- The first division consists of 16 teams and is divided into two championships – the *apertura* (opening) and the *clausura* (closing) – with teams playing each other once in each stage. There is also an Annual Table, in which points from the *apertura* and *clausura* are combined.
- The winners of the opening and closing championships meet over two legs in a "semi-final" (with a third deciding match if the aggregate score is level). The winner of this tie then meets the winners of the Annual Table in the end-of-season Final. Again, this is played over two legs, with the possibility of an extra match if the scores are level.
- It is highly likely that the winners of either the *apertura* or *clausura* will also finish top of the Annual Table. In this case, the *apertura* v *clausura* semi-final is played as usual. If this tie is won by the Annual Table winners, they become champions automatically. If not, the two teams meet again in the end-of-season Final.
- The championship used to follow the calendar year but this was changed in 2005 and it now copies the European season, with a break between December and February.

League clash...Tacuarembo (in red) take on Penarol

Victor CACERES

Holding the key to success

PROUDLY SITTING six points clear at the top of South America's World Cup qualification table, Victor Caceres of Libertad is the only one of Paraguay's starting line-up still playing his football at home. But the holding midfielder is no second-class citizen among the more glamorous exiles and he has become a player of considerable tactical importance.

Fellow midfielder Cristian Riveros has been one of the country's main attacking threats in the World Cup campaign, contributing three goals, and he is quick to acknowledge the role Caceres plays in allowing him to keep bursting into the box. "Caceres is a natural at the defensive side of the game," says Riveros. "He gives the rest of us the possibility to get up and support the attack."

In their recent home games against Venezuela and Peru, Paraguay were able to push forward with both full-backs and their midfielders because Caceres dropped between the centre-backs and operated almost as a sweeper.

"He played in a position that brings out the best in him," said Paraguay coach Gerardo Martino after the Venezuela game.

Caceres supplies defensive height – important in a national team where the central defenders and the keeper are not the tallest – and he's generally cool and constructive in possession. He can be turned, as Juan Roman Riquelme proved when Boca Juniors knocked Libertad out of the 2007 Libertadores Cup, but that was perhaps an inevitable part of a learning curve in what was a key year in Caceres' career.

From a footballing family – one brother, Marcos, is a defender with Racing in Argentina and has also been capped, while another brother, Hugo, also plays in Paraguay – Caceres joined Libertad in 2002. Four years later, with Martino as coach, he was a fringe player, but it was in the following campaign, under Sergio Markarian, that things really started to happen for him.

"When 2007 began I promised myself I would make maximum effort to achieve important things," says the 23-year-old. "I was patient when I had to be and gave my all."

Results came right away. He established himself in the Libertad team, Martino took him into the Paraguay squad and the year ended with Caceres heading the goals that beat Sportivo Luqueno 2-0 to gave his club the title.

He is now an international regular and is a key player in the Libertad side that have won four consecutive championships (from last year, two separate titles per year are awarded).

Javier Torrente has taken over from Ruben Israel as coach at Libertad, but he may not have long to work with his most important midfielder as Caceres' progress has attracted plenty of attention. A year ago there was interest from Flamengo of Brazil (who were put off by the asking price) and more recently he has been linked to clubs in Mexico and Argentina. It seems unlikely that Victor "Topo" Caceres will be the only home-based player in the Paraguay team for much longer.

Tim Vickery

FACT FILE

Club Libertad
Country Paraguay
Born March 25, 1985, in Asuncion
Previous club Atlantida
International debut June 2007, v Mexico
International caps 18
Honours Paraguayan championship 2006, 2007, opening 2008, closing 2008

Simon KJAER

Palermo look ready to cash in again

WHATEVER POSSESSED Palermo president Maurizio Zamparini to dispense with the services of general manager Rino Foschi last summer?

With Luca Toni, Amauri, Andrea Barzagli, Cristian Zaccardo and Fabio Grosso, he had proved himself one of the best recruiting agents in the business, adept at finding cut-price talent which he would later turn to gold.

And Foschi, who bought the Denmark Under-19 captain and centre-back from Midtjylland for £3.3million in what was his last transaction for the Sicilians, believes Kjaer could be the best yet.

"I'm convinced he will, in the future, turn out to be one of the foremost defenders in Europe," says Foschi, who is said to have beaten Chelsea, Liverpool and Real Madrid to the Dane's signature, winning over Midtjylland and their starlet with a mixture of discretion, competence, soft-soap and persistence.

"He has the ability, maturity and desire. I'd like to think I've completed many important buys at Palermo, deals to make me proud. I sincerely believe Simon could rate up there with the best."

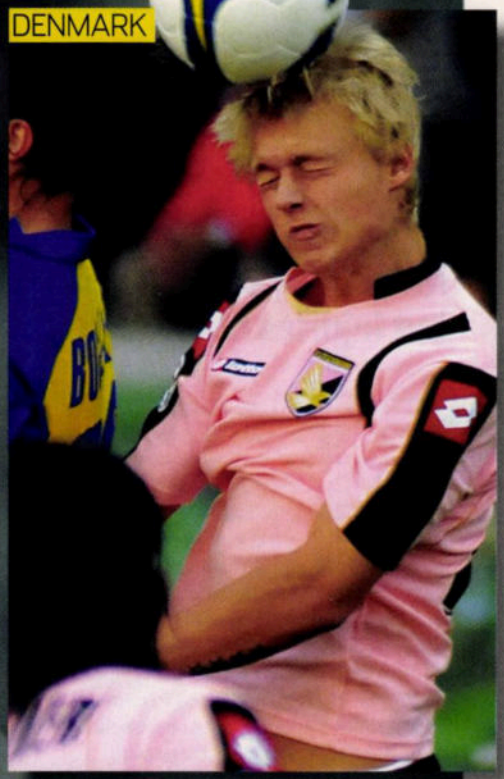
Quick, gritty, excellent in the air and especially strong at reading the intentions of the opposition, Kjaer has been earning praise for his performances – with Milan, Juventus and Valencia already thinking of trying to tempt Zamparini with the chance to make a quick profit.

Nick Bidwell

FACT FILE

Club Palermo (Ita)
Country Denmark
Born March 26, 1989, in Horsens
Previous clubs AC Horsens, Midtjylland

DENMARK



GERMANY

Alexander BAUMJOHANN

Gladbach star is Bayern-bound

ONE GREAT GOAL is sometimes all it requires. Take the Borussia Monchengladbach attacking midfielder Alexander Baumjohann, for example.

Winning the ball deep in his own half against Werder Bremen in August, Baumjohann embarked on a 70-metre dash for glory, outpacing Torsten Frings, cutting inside Naldo and Sebastian Prodl, and beating keeper Tim Wiese with a right-footed cross shot from close range. An amazing feat for someone with just a handful of league games to his name.

His wonder goal served not only to announce his first-team breakthrough at Gladbach but it also put him in the shop window, with Bayern Munich sufficiently impressed to sign him for next season, when he will arrive on a Bosman free.

But Baumjohann has not had the easiest of rides to the top. A class act for Germany Under-17s, Schalke's former boss Jupp Heynckes called him as the biggest talent in the country. However, Schalke's staff did not like his attitude and he was offloaded to Gladbach in January 2007.

At first it seemed he had not learned his lesson. A tendency to deliver only when in the mood kept him on the Gladbach fringes for 18 months and last summer a move to third division Fortuna Dusseldorf was mooted, only for Borussia to scrap the deal when they saw a new-found hunger and commitment.

"He's finally realised that it doesn't just take ability to be a footballer," said Gladbach boss Jos Luhukay earlier this term, before he was sacked.

Perhaps before he also leaves, Baumjohann can repay Gladbach's perseverance with him by helping the club to avoid relegation.

Nick Bidwell

FACT FILE

Club Borussia Monchengladbach
Country Germany
Born January 23, 1987, in Waltrop
Previous clubs Teutonia Waltrop, Schalke

Dutch delight

Marco Van Basten lit up the 1988 European Championship but injuries nearly forced him out, he tells Gavin Hamilton

HAS THERE EVER been a more extraordinary goal in an international Final than the gravity-defying volley from Marco Van Basten that secured Holland their first – and so far only – tournament success: the 1988 European Championship?

Few watching in Munich's Olympic Stadium expected Van Basten to connect with Arnold Muhren's long cross-field pass. But Van Basten, an athlete with the composure and balance of a ballet dancer, had other ideas.

Incredible...Van Basten's wonder goal

"That goal changed everything," recalls Van Basten. "It was the only tournament Holland has won in its whole history and we should be very proud of that."

But 20 years on, Van Basten acknowledges how close Holland came to missing out on their triumph. "Afterwards, it's easy to write a nice book," he reflects. "But things could easily have been very different.

"We had lost our first group game to Russia. Then I came into the game against England. If we had lost that game – and it was a very even match, they hit the post twice – the story would have been completely different. The book would have been completely different."

Van Basten arrived at the tournament in West Germany on the back of a miserable first season in Italy. Troubled by ankle injuries, he had only featured in 11 games for his new club, Milan, and was no longer first choice for his country.

"I had had a very difficult year. I had had problems with my ankle, I had moved from Ajax to Milan," he recalls.

"Everyone was talking about my ankle, so I went to Holland to get a second opinion. The doctor said: 'Your ankle isn't good. We have to operate.' They didn't listen in Milan, they said [an operation] was impossible, the ankle was good enough. But in the end I was operated on and I didn't train or play for five months."

Despite his lack of match fitness, Van Basten was included in the Holland squad and travelled to Germany, but his plan was to use the tournament to get fit for the following season in Italy.

"In the end I made it into the squad but I thought: 'OK, I just want to work hard during the tournament and whatever happens will make me better for the start of the new season with Milan,'" he admits.

Holland coach Rinus Michels had made do without Van Basten throughout the preceding months and the striker's fragility had prompted Michels to use John Bosman and John Van't Schip either side of Ruud Gullit in a three-man attack.

"Michels started preparing the team in February. The team was playing well," says Van Basten. "I was injured and was in Milan, trying to get fit again, so it was perfectly logical for Michels to say: 'I don't want to change a winning team.'"

Hosts West Germany were the clear favourites going into Euro 88, even though coach Franz Beckenbauer had made several changes to the side that had lost to Argentina in the 1986 World Cup Final. Holders France had not qualified, but Italy, Spain, England and the Soviet Union offered experienced, heavyweight opposition, while Denmark still had the nucleus of the "Danish Dynamite" side that had dazzled at the 1984 European Championship and 1986 World Cup.

Meanwhile, Jack Charlton's Republic of Ireland, in their first finals, were the rank outsiders. Holland, in their first major finals since 1980 – having missed out on both the 1982 and 1986 World Cups, as well as Euro 84 – were something of an unknown quantity, although a 2-2 draw with England at Wembley in March 1988 prompted some to cast them in the role of dark horses at Euro 88.

Intriguing parallels

The post-Cruyff generation had struggled to live up to the high standards set by the side of the 1970s, but a new generation of Dutch stars was emerging and there were intriguing parallels with 1974. Michels, coach of the side that lost in the 1974 World Cup Final to West Germany in Munich, was back in charge of the national side as they once again prepared for a tournament on the other side of the border.

Aside from the veteran Arnold Muhren (aged 37), keeper Hans Van Breukelen (31) and full-back Adri Van Tiggelen (30), it was a squad brimming with youth. Van Basten was 23, Gullit 25, Frank Rijkaard 25, Ronald Koeman 25 and midfielder Gerald Vanenburg 24.

Michels, the high priest of "Total Football", may not have created a team to rival his 1970s side, but intelligent, attacking football was the order of the day.

Confidence had been boosted by PSV Eindhoven's European Cup triumph and Ajax's narrow loss in the Final of the Cup-winners Cup, and Gullit – the reigning World and European Player of the Year – boasted: "I don't know if we will win the European Championship but

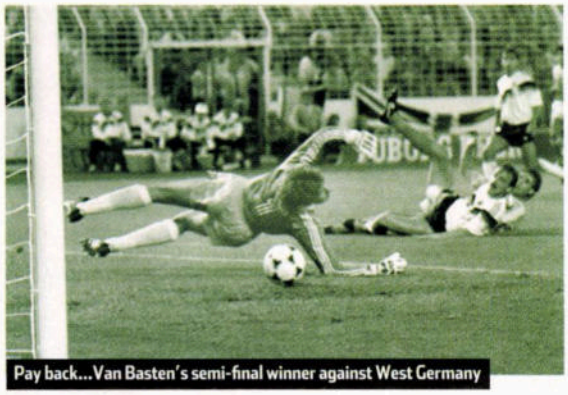
Magic Marco... Van Basten (far right) put Holland 2-0 up in the Final

people will enjoy watching us try."

The run-up had not been entirely smooth as hooligan trouble had threatened to derail the qualifying campaign. After Dutch fans attacked the Cyprus goalkeeper during an 8-0 triumph, UEFA annulled the scoreline and awarded Cyprus a 3-0 victory. However, Holland appealed and the subsequent award of 4-0 win ensured their place in the finals.

Michels had also suffered heart trouble. And then there were Van Basten's injury concerns.

> **"The first half of the season that year I felt the wind had been against me. During the game against England the wind changed and it was behind me. Now everything was possible"**


Pay back...Van Basten's semi-final winner against West Germany

After being left out of the opening 1-0 defeat against the Soviet Union, who were coached by the wily Valeri Lobanovsky, Van Basten had considered walking out on the squad, but was advised against such a course of action by his mentor.

Two decades on, he is more philosophical about Michels' choice of formation, stating: "That's the way we played, that's the players who were used. It was logical."

That defeat by the Soviets forced a major change by Michels and Holland switched from a 4-3-3 formation to 4-4-2, with Van Basten playing alongside Gullit in attack.

"In the end we went to Germany and we lost to Russia in the first game," says Van Basten. "What do you do? There's only three games in the first round. So we changed everything.

"I came in for the game against England. I made an important contribution, scored some goals, and everything seemed easy."

The old enemy

Van Basten's hat-trick in Dusseldorf blew England away and set Holland on course for a semi-final encounter with the old enemy, West Germany.

"The first half of that season that year I felt the wind had been against me," says Van Basten. "During the game against England the wind changed and it was behind me. Now everything was possible.

"In training I had worked hard and little by little, step by step, I felt better. Then, all of a sudden, I had the possibility to come into the game against England. I scored some goals, we played well and then we beat

WHERE ARE THEY NOW? *Brilliant Oranje*

Final XI...the Holland side that lined-up against the Soviet Union in the Euro 88 decider

BACK ROW
(Left to right)

Marco Van Basten
Centre-forward, Milan (Ita)
The star of the tournament. Enjoyed enormous success with Milan before injury forced his premature retirement at the age of 30. Now coach of Ajax.

Ronald Koeman
Sweeper, PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
Had just won the European Cup with PSV and later went on to win it again, with Barcelona in 1992. Sacked as coach of Valencia in April 2008.

Frank Rijkaard
Central defender, Real Zaragoza (Spa)
Spent the six months prior to the finals on loan in Spain after a dispute with Ajax coach Johan Cruyff. Joined Milan after the tournament and had huge success before moving back to Ajax and winning the 1995 European Cup. Left his position as coach of Barcelona last summer.

Erwin Koeman
Left midfield, Mechelen (Bel)
Ronald's older brother. Had spells back in Holland with PSV and Groningen before retiring. Currently national coach of Hungary.

Ruud Gullit
Forward, Milan (Ita)
Enjoyed tremendous success at Milan before having mixed results as a coach with Chelsea, Newcastle United, Feyenoord and, most recently, Los Angeles Galaxy.

Hans Van Breukelen
Goalkeeper, PSV (Hol)
The penalty-saving hero of PSV's European Cup triumph, he retired in 1994 and had a spell as technical director of Utrecht. Now a motivational speaker.

FRONT ROW
(left to right)

Adri Van Tiggelen
Left-back, Anderlecht (Bel)
Later played for PSV and has since had various coaching roles with his first club, Sparta Rotterdam.

Arnold Muhren
Central midfield, Ajax (Hol)
Former Ipswich and Manchester United star who retired in 1989 at the age of 38. Now makes occasional media appearances.

Berry Van Aerle
Right-back, PSV (Hol)
Stayed with PSV until 1994, then spent one season with his home-town club, Helmond. Now scouts for PSV.

Jan Wouters
Central midfield, Ajax (Hol)
Had two seasons with Bayern Munich, then joined PSV, retiring in 1996. Now assistant coach at PSV.

Gerald Vanenburg
Right midfield, PSV (Hol)
Played in Japan, France and Germany. Now coach of second division side FC Eindhoven.

Soviet stoppers...Rijkaard (left) and Ronald Koeman

Mastermind...boss Michels led his side to a first-ever international title

Hat-trick hero...Van Basten against England

Ireland and Germany."

Suddenly, Holland were in the Final, though it is the semi-final victory over West Germany in Hamburg that is most fondly remembered by the Dutch.

In the 1974 World Cup Final, Beckenbauer's artisans had beaten Cruyff's artists. Fourteen years later, that defeat was avenged and the ghosts of wartime occupation were also laid to rest. A penalty apiece had made it a tight encounter, but a late Van Basten winner sealed West Germany's fate.

"The Dutch showed us how to play the aggressive, international way," said Beckenbauer. "You cannot expect to control a player such as Gullit, who is the best individual in Europe."

Yet it was Van Basten who was to light up the Final in Munich. The Soviets had to make do without suspended defender Oleg Kuznetsov, but the match had been quite even until Van Basten's strike stunned everybody in the stadium and killed off Lobanovsky's side.

Thousands upon of thousands of Dutch fans had crossed the border into Germany. Most were ticketless; nearly all were clad head to toe in orange. Back home, hundreds of thousands took to the streets to celebrate a triumph that, weeks earlier, had seemed most unlikely. ●

Champion...Van Basten

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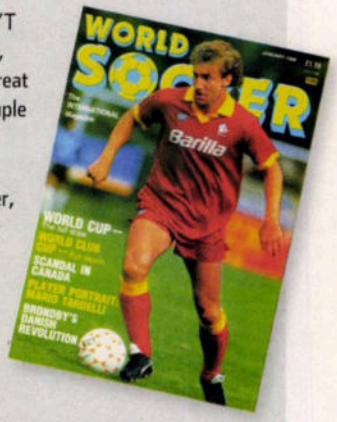
FROM THE **ARCHIVES**

JANUARY 1988

Koeman who?



YOU PROBABLY HAVEN'T heard of Ronald Koeman, but you will certainly hear a great deal about him in the next couple of seasons.

Koeman, PSV Eindhoven and Holland's central defender, is little-known internationally because until recently Dutch football was in decline. Now that Holland is recovering, Koeman is starting to make his name.

Koeman is a sturdy 25-year-old with straight reddish hair and a pale freckled baby face. He is the son and brother of professional footballers. His father Martin played for the north-eastern side Groningen and is now the agent for both his sons.

Ronald's brother Erwin is 27. The two are close friends. Erwin, a left-half who has 7 caps, started at Groningen but now plays for the Belgian Cup winners Mechelen.

Ronald made his debut with Groningen at 17, while still a schoolboy, displacing his school PE teach as Groningen's central midfielder.

Koeman (pronounced "Coo-mun") dominated the team, despite being by far the youngest player; one team-mate had even played with Koeman's father.

Koeman impressed with his intelligent passes, hard tackles and a powerful shot, which has been measured at 65mph. This is exceptionally fast, especially compared to Koeman's own speed, his main weakness.

In April 1983, Koeman played in his first international, a friendly against Sweden. Holland's manager at the time, Kees Ryvers, predicted that Koeman would be Holland's sweeper for the next 10 years. It is more doubtful he will play in Holland during all that time. Koeman will surely follow Ruud Gullit, Marco Van Basten and Frank Rijkaard to southern Europe.

TACTICS The guide to who plays how

EUROPEAN NATIONAL TEAMS

4-2-3-1: SPOILT FOR CHOICE

With *Les Bleus* making a stuttering start on the road to South Africa, coach Raymond Domenech has been accused of not knowing his best system. He began with 4-4-2, then switched to 4-1-3-2, in the 3-1 defeat in Austria; a 2-1 win at home to Serbia was achieved using 4-2-3-1; and then he alternated between 4-2-3-1 and 4-4-2 in the 2-2 draw in Romania. The French were at their most convincing in 4-2-3-1 mode in the second half in Romania. The trio of Yoann Gourcuff, Franck Ribery and Thierry Henry left the home side with no answer to their invention and changes of rhythm.

Talent...Gourcuff

3-4-3: SAFETY FIRST

In three of Greece's four matches, coach Otto Rehhagel has opted for a 3-4-3, making him one of the rare international bosses to employ a three-man back line. During his time in charge of Barcelona, Johan Cruyff used this formation as a template for attacking thrills and spills – but not so "King Otto", who is cautious to the marrow. Nominal wing-backs Giourkas Seitaridis and Vasilis Torosidis are on defensive duty for long periods, and central midfielders Angelos Basinas and Kostas Katsouranis also play deep. The net result is the isolation of the front runners, who are forced to retreat into the vacant midfield space in search of the ball.

Duty...Torosidis

A TACTICAL HISTORY OF... Roy Hodgson

Swiss role...Hodgson was coach of Switzerland for three-and-a-half years

1976 HALMSTADS 4-4-2/4-3-3

Against all odds, the Croydon-born Hodgson guided the unfashionable provincials to their first-ever Swedish title. A 4-4-2, with a relentless pressing game and a flat back four that made extensive use of the offside trap, was his default formation, though he often switched to three in attack, with Lars-Erik Larsson and Sigge Johansson flanking tall striker Rutger Backe.

1992 SWITZERLAND 4-4-2

Previous Switzerland coaches had tried in vain to marry German and Latin influences and were laughed out of town when they argued for the use of a zonal defence. Hodgson, however, had no such difficulties in winning converts to his system; the key moment being a 2-2 draw in Italy. Here was proof that it was possible to play without a sweeper – and that a compact, highly disciplined unit could live with the very best.

1997 INTERNAZIONALE 4-3-1-2

He arrived at the San Siro in 1995 cast as Inter's answer to Arrigo Sacchi, the former Milan coach who changed the face of Italian football with his aggressive pressing tactics and attacking style. But although his side were athletic and highly organised, there was an obvious fault line. Apart from Youri Djorkaeff in the "hole", imagination was lacking, particularly in wide areas, and safety first tended to be the order of the day.

Sample formations from World Cup 2010 qualifiers

4-3-3: QUICK CHANGE

After using a 4-4-1-1 to steer the *Azzurri* to victory at the last World Cup, second-time-around boss Marcello Lippi has been putting his faith in a 4-3-3. His midfield has featured Roma's Daniele De Rossi as the fulcrum, the fire in the belly of Rino Gattuso (who has since suffered a serious knee injury) on the right and either Simone Perrotta, Alberto Aquilani or Riccardo Montolivo on the left. Target man Luca Toni is serviced by the Udinese pair, Antonio Di Natale and rookie Simone Pepe. A flick of a switch has them in 4-4-2 mode, with Di Natale going alongside Toni and Pepe moving to the engine room.

Front man...Di Natale

4-4-1-1: SUPPORT SYSTEM

If the Baltic nation are punching above their weight in Group 7 with wins over Romania, Austria and the Faroes, it is in no small part thanks to coach Jose Couceiro. Yes, he has them functioning better as a defensive unit, but this system is not the conservative one it might seem at first glance. Lone striker Tomas Danilevicius certainly cannot complain of a lack of support as Saulius Mikoliunas and Deividas Cesnauskis are more wingers than up-and-down midfielders, young Linas Pilibaitis does well as the support striker and full-back Marius Stankevicius advances with infinite purpose.

Skipper...Danilevicius

How the Fulham manager's teams have changed down the years

2007 FINLAND 4-4-1-1

While his side rarely hit the aesthetic heights during the Euro 2008 qualifiers – just 13 goals in 14 ties and five goalless draws – he nevertheless did a fine job, taking them very close to the finals. A 4-4-2 was the norm, but for away trips such as Serbia (0-0) he opted for the lone-striker model with an inventive-type positioned behind. As with all his teams, Finland were extremely hard to break down, with two well-drilled banks of four.

2009 FULHAM 4-4-2

There is more than a hint of *catenaccio* in his approach at Craven Cottage. The Premiership side pull almost everyone behind the ball when the opposition have control, put the player in possession under pressure and look to counter swiftly from the breakdown. In midfield, the wide men tuck in and Danny Murphy is the orchestrator. An alternative is the 4-4-1-1, with Andrew Johnson up front on his own.

Premier approach... Hodgson's Fulham side beat Arsenal earlier this season

Success...Steaua celebrate qualifying for this season's Champions League group stage

Eternal derby

Peterjon Cresswell takes a tour of the Romanian capital, where much of the country's footballing power still lies in the hands of two clubs

LAST YEAR, ANOTHER revolution took place in Romania. For the first time in nearly two decades, a club from outside the capital, Bucharest, won the League. Almost inevitably, however, the triumph of CFR Cluj culminated in controversy, with associates of the Steaua Bucharest owner, Gigi Becali, allegedly found with a suitcase full of money in a Cluj restaurant.

High hopes...Brazilian defender Julio Cesar helped Dinamo top the table at this season's winter break

Controversy, dark deeds and corruption typify football in this madhouse of a city where, for longer than the locals care to remember, the title has swung between the domestic game's two great powers, Dinamo and Steaua – with the former representing the interior ministry, the latter the army.

Even after the overthrow of brutal Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu in 1989, the cloak-and-dagger nature of Romanian society is such that little may have changed behind the scenes. Although Rapid, Bucharest's third club, now get a look in, and Cluj produced something completely out of the box last May, Dinamo and Steaua remain the biggest and best supported clubs.

However, of all the ex-socialist capitals, most with several clubs in their respective top divisions, only Moscow itself overshadows Bucharest for the quality of its football.

Romantic names

Before the post-war Communist reconstruction of sport, Bucharest was a little-known footballing outpost, even though the game had been encouraged by the ruling monarch, King Carol, who sent the national team to the first World Cup in 1930. At domestic level, Bucharest teams with romantic names such as Venus and Juventus challenged the pre-war football powerhouse of Timisoara.

Steaua were founded by royal military officers in June 1947, when the country was still a constitutional monarchy with a mainly Communist government, and the club changed acronyms – ASA, CSCA and CCA –

> **Victory for either Steaua or Dinamo reflected the power struggle between the army and the secret police**

on a regular basis until settling on Steaua in 1961. Able to attract the country's top young talent to its base in south-west Bucharest with the promise of foreign travel and no national service, by the 1980s Steaua were playing at an impressive purpose-built stadium in Ghencea and claiming major scalps in Europe while running neck-and-neck with arch-rivals Dinamo for the League at home.

Formed following the merger of Unirea Tricolor and Ciocanul Bucharest, Dinamo had come into being in 1948 and moved into their current home, just north of the city centre, three years later.

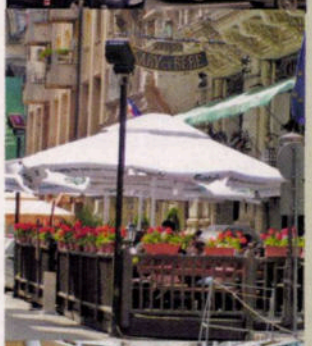
Games between Steaua and Dinamo, known as "the eternal derby", reflected the internal power struggle between the army and ministry of the interior (better known as the infamous secret police).

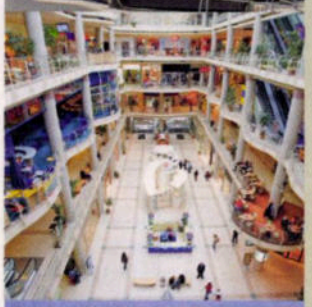
Matters came to a head at the notorious

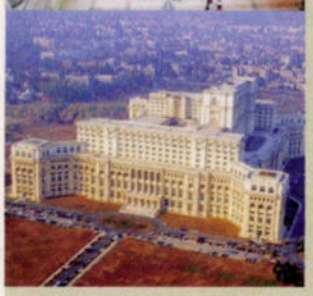
Champions of Europe...Steaua skipper Stefan Iovan lifts the European Cup in 1986

SURVIVAL GUIDE

Eastern promise







● ARRIVAL & TRANSPORT

Bucharest has two airports: Otopeni (national carriers) and Baneasa (mainly budgets). Otopeni is 25 miles north of the city; Baneasa is less than 10 miles north. From Otopeni, bus 783 (every 30 minutes) takes about an hour to call at key points in the city centre. Buy tickets (8 lei/£1.70 return) from the kiosk by the Arrivals hall. The Fly Taxi cartel outside Arrivals charges 70 lei (£15) for central Bucharest. From Baneasa, take city buses 131 or 335 with a standard ticket (1.30 lei/£0.28). A taxi should cost about 25 lei (£5.30). Tickets for the metro cost 2.20 lei (£0.47) for two trips, 8 lei (£1.70) for 10 trips and 4 lei (£0.85) for a day pass.

● HOTELS & INFORMATION

Bucharest has no tourist office or hotel booking service. The most famous hotel is the Athenee Palace (Episcopiei 1-3, +40 21 303 37 77, www.hilton.com, £225), with contemporary leisure facilities to match its historic pedigree. For character, the recently opened Amzei (Piata Amzei 8, +40 21 313 94 00, www.hotelamzei.ro, £112) is cut above. Central Banat (Piata Rosetti 5, +40 21 313 10 56, £63) is a great budget option with triples and apartments also available.

● EATING & DRINKING

Soups, stews and meat-and-rice dishes abound, although Romanian cuisine lacks the finesse of its Bulgarian or Hungarian neighbours. Caru cu Bere (Stavropoleos 5, +40 21 313 75 60) is a century-old tourist haunt; authentic domestic dishes come without the crowds at Crama Domneasca (Selari 13-15). Sports and expat bars such as SALT (Bianari 21, +40 21 314 22 14), the Dubliner (N Titulescu 18, +40 21 222 94 73) and the Offside Pub (Gabroveni 14, +40 21 312 29 16) all do decent meals. More bohemian outlets, such as Papa La Soni (Sfinti 13), also put on a decent spread. For cocktails, try the Mystic Tree (Mantuleasa 8). Club-wise, the chic crowd can be found at Bamboo (Ramuri Tei Park, www.bamboosportingclub.ro), while there's a more underground scene at Studio Martin (Iancu de Hunedoara 61, www.studiomartin.ro).

● DAYTIME ENTERTAINMENT

The most famous, and infamous, attraction in Romania is the Parliament Palace, Ceausescu's 12-storey monolith in the city centre. There are regular guided tours. Nearby is the 16th-century Curtea Veche (Old Court Church). Also downtown, the Museum of National History (Calea Victoriei 12, +40 21 315 8207, www.mnir.ro) covers periods from the prehistoric to the 20th century. Strada Lipscani and Piata Revolutiei contain the more interesting boutiques, while you'll find international chains and brands in the Bucharest Mall (Calea Vitan 55-59).

THE STADIUMS

Artist's impression...the new National Stadium

Steaua's ground...Ghencea Stadium

Dinamo Stadium...home of the Red Dogs

Rapid venue...Giulesti Stadium

New look

The National Stadium is currently being overhauled at a cost of £115million. By 2010, it will be a UEFA five-star, 55,000-capacity arena capable of staging major finals. The complex is located in east Bucharest, on B-dul Basarabia, near Muncii metro station, and the 16 and 40 tramline.

Within a short walk of Stefan cel Mare metro stop, Dinamo's modest ground is also being renovated. It currently holds 15,600 and has the same municipal look as when it first opened in 1956. The Red Dogs grill bar (with WiFi) offers pre-match beers in the main entrance concourse. A statue of Dinamo star Catalin Hildan, who died of a heart attack while playing in a friendly at the age of 24, stands behind one goal.

Until the new National Stadium opens, Steaua's ground is easily the best in the country. Unveiled in 1974, it was overhauled in 2006 and has the most luxurious VIP section this side of Vienna – armchair seats! The Ghencea also boasts undersoil heating, TV replays on the scoreboard and decent press facilities. Nearly 30,000 fans are squeezed in close to the action on match days. Sadly, the Ghencea is awkward to reach by public transport – it's situated at the terminus of the tram 41 line, which (eventually) passes Crangasi metro stop in Rapid territory. A taxi might be best. There are a couple of bars by the tram terminus.

For Rapid, Grivita metro is equally close to the tatty Valentin Stanescu ground (capacity 19,000). There are plans to build a completely new 30,000 arena by 2011 but, in the meantime, some of Bucharest's loyalest supporters gather at the Giulestina bar/restaurant by the main ticket office.

Cup Final of 1988, when a scandal of bizarre refereeing decisions, mass protests and ugly scenes in front of the VIP balcony meant the trophy was never officially awarded.

With star names such as Cornel Dinu, Florea Dumitrache and Dudu Georgescu, Dinamo had began to make a name for themselves in Europe and, in 1984, Nicolae "Nicusor" Dimitru's rugged outfit reached the semi-finals of the European Cup.

Not to be outdone, two years later, under Emerich Jenei, Steaua went one better and reached the Final, where they met Barcelona. Laszlo Boloni and Miodrag Belodedici kept Terry Venables' attackers from goalkeeper Helmuth Duckadam's door, before this unlikely hero stopped Barca's spot kicks to give Steaua, Romania and eastern Europe a first European Cup.

Drafting in Sportul Studentesc's Gheorghe Hagi (the most significant of Steaua's forced transfers), the club also made the Final in 1989, losing to Milan.

Free-market economy

However, the new free-market economy was soon to change the structure of football in Romania, with top players leaving for the West and clubs no longer receiving support from powerful state bodies.

Dinamo temporarily reverted to their former name of Unirea Tricolor, but old ties to ministerial bodies meant easy profits on quick foreign transfers.

And while quality coaches – such as Dinu and Ioan Andone – brought domestic success for both clubs, the post-Ceausescu period has been largely overshadowed by the Becalis.

As foul-mouthed, right-wing politician Gigi became president of Steaua, so his brother Ioan took over at Dinamo – sacking Andone in 2005 within months of the Reds thrashing Everton in the UEFA Cup. Steaua made the semi-final in the same competition the following year, but the decade has mostly been marked by fan violence, suspicious results and major young talent, most notably Adrian Mutu, going West.

Untainted by murky authoritarian might, railway club Rapid came to the fore thanks to popular support and the financial clout of local entrepreneur George Copos, with coach Mircea Lucescu leading the team to the title in 1999 and 2003. In 2006 Rapid narrowly lost to Steaua on away goals in all-Romanian UEFA Cup quarter-final.

> **"Old ties to ministerial bodies meant easy profits on quick foreign transfers"**

Just south of Giulesti, Rapid's base in north-west Bucharest, is the district of Cotroceni, home of Progresul. Cup finalists and league runners-up several times from the mid-1990s, Progresul are in need of major funds to lift them out of the second division. Hagi's old club Sportul Studentesc, in the district of Regie, are in a similar plight. ●

Local affair...Rapid (in white) and Steaua tangle in the 2006 UEFA Cup quarter-finals

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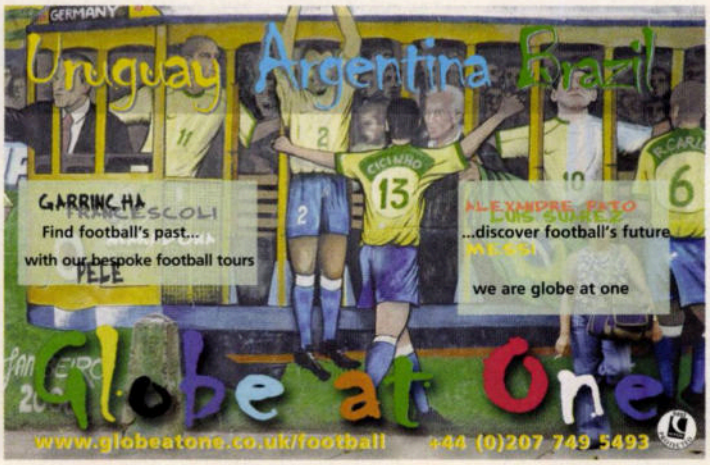

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No way through...Oman's Mohamed Rabia (left) and Ahmed Mubarak get to grips with Saudia Arabia's Yasser Al-Qahtani in the Gulf Cup Final

Hoffenheim's hopes hit

THE TITLE ASPIRATIONS of surprise mid-term leaders Hoffenheim suffered a severe blow when Bosnia striker Vedad Ibisevic, top of the Bundesliga scoring charts at the winter break, was ruled out for the rest of the season after rupturing knee ligaments during a warm-up game against Hamburg in La Manga, Spain.

"This was a day when we all should have stayed in bed," said team-mate Selim Teber.

Ibisevic's value to his side simply cannot be overestimated. A remarkable strike rate of 18 goals in 19 matches constituted almost half the club's goals up until Christmas. The 24-year-old had proved particularly decisive in close-run encounters, scoring eight times in 1-0 victories.

To fill the void, general manager Jan Schindelmeiser promptly turned to the transfer market. An approach for Arsenal's Nicklas Bendtner was rejected, but Werder Bremen's Ivory Coast marksman Boubacar Sanogo came on loan. Although Sanogo, 26, has spent most of the season on the Bremen bench, he can, on his day, pose plenty of problems for defenders with his physical presence and hard running. Previously with Esperance in Tunisia, Al Ain of the UAE, Kaiserslautern and Hamburg, he also has the reputation for making an instant impact.

A further cause for Hoffenheim concern is wayward Brazilian playmaker Carlos Eduardo. He was sent off for his part in a bantamweight bout of fisticuffs with Ivica Olic in the Hamburg friendly and, for good measure, had a spat on the training pitch with team-mate Marvin Compper. Could it be that Eduardo is unsettled, perhaps distracted by talk of a big-money move?

Another Brazilian behaving badly this season is Bremen's Diego. In December he was handed a three-match ban for grabbing Karlsruhe's Christian Eichner by the throat – the incident was missed by the referee and his assistants, but not by TV cameras – and he has been the subject of numerous tabloid headlines, the majority relating to an affair with pop singer Sarah Connor and a drink-driving charge.

Certain team-mates are reported to be increasingly annoyed by his antics which does not augur well for Bremen's hopes of being able to put a poor first half of the season behind them and qualify for the Champions League. With Juventus, Chelsea and Manchester City (the latest port of his old Santos and Brazil team-mate Robinho) watching the situation extremely closely, Diego's days in the Bundesliga appear distinctly numbered.

Undoubtedly the highlight of the last 16 of the German Cup was Bayern Munich's 5-1 stroll at Stuttgart, who just six weeks earlier had given the Bavarians a real run for their money in a 2-2 draw in the Bundesliga. This time, though, it was a completely different story.

An imaginative and effervescent Bayern ran rings around a sorry Stuttgart, who might have suffered more had Franck Ribery not tamely chipped a penalty straight at Jens Lehmann.

"This sort of thing doesn't sit well with me," stormed Bayern general manager Uli Hoeness. "It's 'Cirque du Soleil' stuff. Franck has to forget taking penalties like this. It's not what we want." As for Ribery, he was contrition itself, saying: "I just wanted to have some fun."

Ribery might be the biggest name in the Bundesliga, the cheeky chappie with feet of velvet rated in £140million bracket. But the relationship between him and his club leaves a little to be desired. His demand for new faces to strengthen the team angered chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge while coach Jurgen Klinsmann recently ordered Ribery not to dribble excessively, which left the Frenchman not best pleased.

The most significant Cup shock came at Karlsruhe, who lost 1-0 to relegation-threatened second division side Wehen Wiesbaden, a giant-killing which put the latter into the quarter-finals for the first time.

Nick Bidwell

Walking wounded...Hoffenheim's prolific striker Ibisevic will be sidelined for the rest of the season

New ball game...Marseille's Brazilian striker Brandao, just arrived from Shakhtar Donetsk, loses an aeriel battle with Jeremy Toulalan of Lyon in the French Cup

FRANCE

Few window wonders

PERHAPS it was the current financial crisis that curbed everyone's enthusiasm to spend or maybe it is just the fact that France is lagging behind as a desirable destination for players these days.

Whatever way you look at it, the transfer window failed to produce much in the way of interest in Ligue 1. When the most interesting activity is the arrival of veteran striker Sylvain Wiltord at Marseille after a disappointing time at Rennes, then you know the market is anything but buoyant.

Does the return to French soil from Scotland of former Bordeaux man Jean-Claude Darcheville (Rangers to Valenciennes) constitute excitement? It's debatable. And there is no doubt at all that Marseille's capture of 6ft 2in Brazilian striker Brandao from Shakhtar Donetsk (see Six of the Best, page 58) left the public underwhelmed, despite coach Eric Gerets' insistence that the player will do OM "lots of good". Given the fans were led to believe that their club were in hot pursuit of Lukas Podolski and Didier Drogba, it is easy to understand why this did not really wash.

These aren't exactly happy days down on the south coast just now, despite Marseille's creditable league form so far this season.

Majority shareholder Robert Louis-Dreyfus came out in public to criticise president Pape Diouf for failing to land any silverware since taking charge in 2005. Diouf wasn't slow to retort and came out fighting, claiming among other things that at least his tenure at the club hadn't been blighted by corruption – a thinly veiled reference to Marseille's black days of the early 1990s. Gerets questioned Louis-Dreyfus' timing in making the remarks and, given the Belgian's tough-guy image and the fact that his contract expires at the end of the season, it could well be that he will walk if relations don't thaw by the summer.

But if Marseille are going through internal squabbles, at least they can rest safe in the knowledge that rivals Paris Saint-Germain are beset by some extraordinary internal combustion. Just as coach Paul Le Guen is finally starting to get things right on the field – taking PSG up the table and nurturing decent young talent such as giant centre-forward Guillaume Hoarau and dynamic midfielder Stephane Sessegnon, it is crisis time again.

PSG president Charles Villeneuve, in charge only since May last year, must go through a re-election process he has no chance of winning after the board resigned in protest at his behaviour. The dispute revolves around Villeneuve wanting more control and suggesting the club needs to look for more finance in the short term, a claim its administrators reject.

Whether these ructions will impact on the field is yet to be seen, but the troubles at both Marseille and PSG can only strengthen the hand of Lyon's only other serious title challenger, Bordeaux.

It appears that over on the west coast things couldn't be more serene with *Les Girondins'* coach Laurent Blanc extending his contract by another two years until 2011. Voted Manager of the Year in 2008 by his fellow bosses, Blanc's calm authority and stated desire for his team to play entertaining – as well as winning – football has endeared him to many in France. Bordeaux are the most satisfying team to watch in a league that doesn't always provide much in the way of spectacle, and most neutrals would love to see an end to the Lyon hegemony.

The champions will be difficult to dislodge from their lofty pedestal. However, landing an eighth successive title will not necessarily do Lyon much good in a country that has never really taken the club to its heart and which still has much more of a warm feeling in its collective bones for PSG, Marseille, Lens and Saint-Etienne.

Perhaps only a Champions League Final appearance will soften neutral French hearts towards Lyon – but with Barcelona to face in the first knockout round of this year's competition it's almost impossible to see them mounting a serious challenge in 2009.

Howard Johnson

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

Heavy duty...Porto's Hulk powers past Vandinho Almeida during the 2-0 win at Braga which took the Dragons to the top of the league

PORTUGAL

Porto back in top gear

AFTER A DISAPPOINTING start to the season, Porto have found their best form again. Shortly after seeing his side take over from Benfica at the top of the table, coach Jesualdo Ferreira declared: "We are back where we belong."

The reason the club have a fourth straight title in their sights has as much to do with Ferreira's decision to stop tinkering with his starting line-up as it does with the performances of Brazilian forward Hulk. The 22-year-old, who joined the Dragons from Tokyo Verdy in the summer, struggled to adapt to Portuguese football at first, but he has now found his feet and his goals helped beat Nacional and Estrela Amadora during an impressive unbeaten run.

The defending champions' surge has coincided with a dreadful run of form from Benfica. Quique Sanchez Flores saw his team score just once in four League games as they surrendered top spot.

The Lisbon giants hit rock-bottom with a 2-0 defeat at struggling Trofense, an inept performance that had critics wondering what it would take for players such as Pablo Aimar, Oscar Cardozo and David Suazo to start performing consistently.

Liedson's goalscoring exploits kept Sporting in the title hunt. The Brazilian, now in his sixth season at the Jose Alvalade stadium, became the club's all-time foreign-born top scorer when he bagged his 127th goal for the Lions.

Ironically, Liedson's achievement came at a time when the striker was acquiring Portuguese citizenship. He could be called up by Carlos Queiroz for the upcoming 2010 World Cup qualifiers.

Pedro Pinto

AUSTRIA

Salzburg sign Swede

Red Bull Salzburg have signed goalkeeper Eddie Gustafsson as a replacement for long-term injured Timo Ochs. The American-born Swede hopes success with Salzburg will earn him a spot in Sweden's 2010 World Cup squad.

League leaders Salzburg had to act quickly after Ochs suffered a torn thigh muscle and will be sidelined until April. "We searched the market and Eddie was the perfect pick," said Salzburg sporting director Heinz Hochhauser.

It is certainly a step up for Gustafsson, who joined on a free transfer from Norwegians Lyn. He said: "Salzburg could easily dominate the Norwegian league. Football in Austria is much faster from what I have seen."

Meanwhile, Salzburg striker Marc Janko, a target for some of Europe's top clubs in the transfer window, has signed a two-year contract extension, tying him to the club until 2013.

Former assistant national and youth coach Peter Persidis has died at the age of 61.

Harry Miltner

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Managers merry-go-round

It has been one of the busiest close seasons for managerial changes, and seven of the 12 Premier Division clubs will start the new term with new bosses.

Paul Doolin, who led Drogheda United to their first title in 2007, has moved to Cork City to replace Alan Mathews. The Drogs, meanwhile, have been in administration and their future is very uncertain. If they do get a licence for the new season it may only be for the First Division.

Jeff Kenna, who did a good job keeping Galway United up at the end of last season, has moved to Dublin, where he has replaced Johnny McDonald at St Patrick's Athletic. Kenna's assistant will be his former Derby County team-mate Paul Peschisolido. Ian Foster, Kenna's assistant in Galway, has been promoted at Terryland Park.

Former Celtic star Joe Miller has been named assistant to Sean Connor at Dundalk, while UCD, who were relegated last season, have parted company with Pete Mahon. His former assistant Martin Russell is now in charge of the students.

Sean Creedon

LIECHTENSTEIN

Vaduz take on Schacht

FC Vaduz have appointed Dietmar "Didi" Schacht as new coach, to work alongside his fellow German, sports director Pierre Littbarski. Schacht, 46, played for many years in the Bundesliga where he was captain of Schalke.

The club were also active in the January transfer window, signing five new players: Ivory Coast striker Eugene Dadi on loan from Australian club Perth Glory, Germany Under-21 keeper Thorsten Kirschbaum from Hoffenheim, Iceland striker Gudmundur Steinarsson (IBK Keflavik), German defender Tobias Nickenig (Koln) and Australian central defender Mark Rudan from Avisa Fukuoka of Japan.

National team captain Mario Frick celebrated his 100th appearance in Italy's Serie A by striking a superb matchwinner for Siena against their relegation rivals Reggina.

Graeme Crawford

Not quite goodbye... Oeri with coach Gross

SWITZERLAND

Oeri resignation shocks Basle

GISELA "GIGI" OERI has stepped down as chairwoman of Basle and handed over to vice-president Bernard Heusler.

The news came as a shock to both club and Swiss football in general but Oeri had complained that, despite many successful years with the club, during which they won eight trophies, she was often the butt of unfair media criticism.

Heusler, 45, said he would take over Oeri's role in transfer negotiations and work closely with the players and coach Christian Gross, with whom he has had a long association.

Oeri, a major shareholder, will look after new projects, including the founding of FCB-Campus, a training camp for talented youngsters first pioneered by rivals Grasshopper.

The move of 20-year-old striker Eren Derdiyok from Basle to Germany's Bayer Leverkusen did not happen in the January window, with negotiations apparently stalled over the fee.

Leverkusen's sporting director, Rudi Voller, was prepared to hold on, saying: "We can wait until summer. We want him and he wants to join us." Derdiyok added: "I want to win the league with Basle and then I am going to Leverkusen."

Xavier Margairaz has returned from Spain. The midfield general is back at FC Zurich on loan from Osasuna after struggling with injuries.

Good news for national coach Ottmar Hitzfeld is that Grasshopper's Brazilian-born striker Antonio Dos Santos has become a Swiss citizen.

Ivar Von Rulach

BELGIUM

Witsel leads Standard sweep

REIGNING champions Standard all but monopolised the honours at the 55th Belgian Golden Shoe awards.

Midfielder Axel Witsel collected 204 votes from the panel of journalists, coaches, former winners and footballing VIPs to win the Player of the Year award by just four votes from team-mate Milan Jovanovic. Marouane Fellaini, who left for Everton at the start of the season, came third but was also named the nation's best foreign-based player. Anderlecht's Mbark Boussoufa was fourth, but then came two more Standard players – last year's winner Steven Defour and Dieumerci Mbokani.

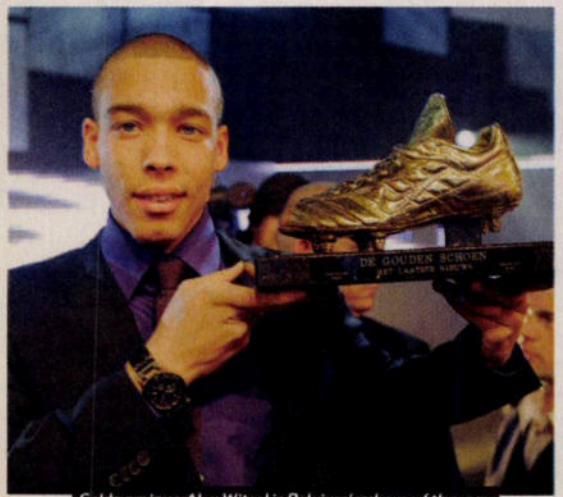
Silvio Proto, the Germinal Beerschot goalkeeper, received the best goal of the year award for his header in added time that earned a dramatic 2-2 draw against Gent last September.

City rivals Club Brugge responded to their end-of-year slump – compounded by an embarrassing 1-0 Cup exit at home to bottom-of-the-table Roeselare – by signing promising midfielders Marc-Andre Kruska and Vadis Odjidja-Ofoe. Kruska, 21, the Germany Under-21 captain, was recruited from Borussia Dortmund, while Odjidja-Ofoe, 19, once of Anderlecht, arrived from Hamburg.

The biggest Cup shock was suffered by Zulte Waregem, eliminated 10-9 in a penalty shoot-out by third division hosts KRC Mechelen after 120 minutes failed to produce a goal. The minnows' city rivals KV Mechelen also went through, beating Anderlecht 2-1, but the two Mechelen clubs avoided each other in the quarter-finals, where the pick of the ties was Gent v Genk.

RFC Seraing, once proud members of the elite, are to fold. The club, who had slipped into the fourth tier, announced their demise after a 3-0 home defeat by SC Wijgmaal and the players told to look for new clubs.

Nicholas Harling



Golden prize...Alex Witsel is Belgium's player of the year

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

SCOTLAND

Butcher is the boss

FORMER ENGLAND captain Terry Butcher has taken over as manager at Inverness Caledonian Thistle after Craig Brewster was sacked. Butcher will retain his part-time role as assistant to Scotland manager George Burley.

Caley Thistle's poor form this season has left the club in danger of relegation from the Scottish Premier League, prompting Butcher to admit: "There is a lot of ground to make up on the other teams. It will require a superhuman effort, but we also know what we have to do."

Meanwhile, fellow strugglers St Mirren bid farewell to Love Street stadium, their home since 1894. The Paisley-based side have moved to a new 8,000-capacity ground nearby.

One of the two Glasgow giants will claim the first silverware of the season after they booked their places in the Final of the League Cup.

It was a comfortable cruise through the semi-finals for holders Rangers, with Nacho Novo spearheading a 3-0 victory over Falkirk, but Celtic had a much tougher time of it against Dundee United. The Hoops were held to a goalless stalemate in normal and extra-time, before they won 11-10 on penalties. Midfielder Willo Flood, who missed the vital spot-kick for the Tangerines, was on loan at United from Cardiff City and signed a two-and-a-half year permanent deal later that week...with Celtic.

Dan Brennan

Flood of tears...the Dundee United midfielder's penalty struck the crossbar

SWEDEN

One more year for Larsson

Henrik Larsson is expected to sign on for another year with Helsingborg. His decision will be a huge relief for coach Bo Nilsson, not too mention national boss Lars Lagerback, who has lost Zlatan Ibrahimovic to suspension for the crucial World Cup qualifier in Portugal on March 28.

Meanwhile, Malmo have sold striker Ola Toivonen to PSV Eindhoven for around £4million (see Six of the Best, page 58). Midfielder Viktor Elm and top scorer Patrik Ingelsten have left champions Kalmar for Heerenveen.

Last season's runners-up Elfsborg signed midfielder Martin Ericsson from Danish side Brondby, while third-placed IFK brought back defender Karl Svensson from Caen.

In Stockholm, 2008 flops AIK and Djurgarden have changed coaches. Mikael Stahre took over from Rikard Norling at AIK and Djurgarden replaced Siggi Jonsson with a duo: Andree Jeglertz and Zoran Lukic. The latter led Djurgarden to League titles in 2002 and 2003.

Per Johansson

NORTHERN IRELAND

Portadown plot promotion

Portadown, still smarting after being relegated for failing to make their application on time for the new-look Premiership, top the Championship.

Ronnie McFall's side underlined their credentials after booking a place in the League Cup Final, against Newry City at the end of February, with a 16th successive victory in all competitions.

Starring for the Ports are strikers Kevin Braniff, Gary McCutcheon and Richard Leckey, along with midfielders Wesley Boyle and Richard Clarke.

Champions Linfield have attempted to boost an unconvincing strike force by signing Kevin McHugh from Derry City for £20,000 and Mark McAllister from Dungannon Swifts for £35,000.

McAllister scored his first goal for the Blues in a 1-0 victory over his old club, enabling Linfield to leapfrog Glentoran at the top of the table.

Roy Kitson

WALES

Rhyl reinforce

Trading during the January transfer window was steady as League leaders Rhyl brought midfielder Luke Sherbon from Aberystwyth and The New Saints signed St Kitts and Nevis Under-20 international Matthew Berkeley.

Champions Llanelli were second on goal difference, with Saints in third spot after dropping unlikely points.

The New Saints and Bangor City will meet in the League Cup Final.

Mel Thomas

ICELAND

Thordarson takes on Crewe

Former national team coach Gudjon Thordarson has been appointed manager of Crewe Alexandra in the English third tier.

And Teitur Thordarson celebrated his first full season in charge of Vancouver Whitecaps by winning the US Soccer League division one title.

Rab Christie

ESTONIA

RIP TVMK

TVMK Tallinn, champions in 2005, are the first victims of an economic crisis in Estonian football.

"TVMK was never a business project for me. It was a hobby, I also felt a social responsibility," owner Pjotr Sedin said. "But it was clear already in the summer that I am not able to support the team any more."

TVMK coach Sergei Ratnikov has joined Trans Narva along with his sons Eduard and Daniil, Aivar Anniste and Markus Jurgenson moved to Flora Tallinn, while Artjom Dmitrijev and Nikolai Masitsev joined Lithuanian side Vetra Vilnius.

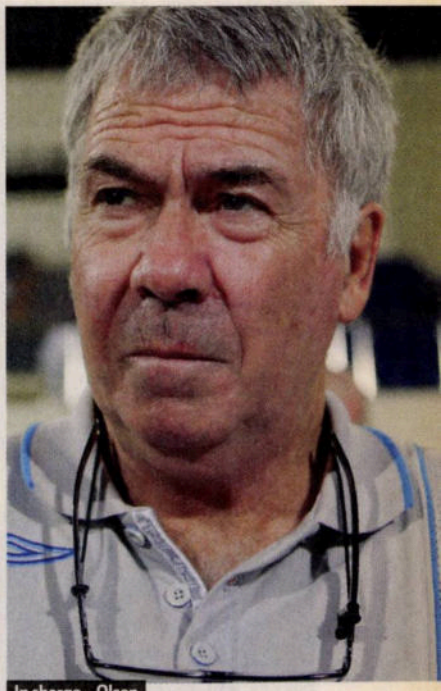
Andres Must

LATVIA

National star off to Spain

Maris Verpakovskis has joined Spanish side Celta Vigo on loan from Dynamo Kyiv until the end of the season, while Pavels Mihadjuks became the first Latvian in the Scottish Premier League when he joined Inverness Caledonian Thistle on loan from Ventspils.

Andres Must



In charge...Olsen

NORWAY

Second spell for Olsen

EGIL OLSEN, the man who took Norway to the World Cup in 1994 and 1998, has taken charge of the national side on a short-term basis.

He will remain in charge at least until the summer and, with positive results, could stay on for the remaining World Cup qualifying campaign.

"Even though I'm 66, I feel strong physically and mentally," said Olsen.

As the clubs get ready for the new season, Brann signed Danish veteran striker David Nielsen From Odense and let Gambia striker Njogu Demba-Nyren go in the opposite direction. Another Brann veteran, Erlend Hanstveit, left on a free transfer for Gent.

Valerenga defender Kjetil Waehler has joined Danish club Aalborg on a permanent deal, with striker Luton Shelton making the same move on loan. Stabaek, who lost striker Veigar Pall Gunnarsson to Nancy in France, also saw Brazilian midfielder Alazinho (Norway's Player of the Year in 2008) leave for Turkish club Trabzonspor.

Lyn have also lost key players but added Petter Furuseth Olsen to their squad, six months after he decided to retire from football.

Sigurd Odegaard

DENMARK

Like father, like sons

Daddy's boy...Mads Laudrup

THE LAUDRUP name is never long out of the headlines in Denmark...and now it is the two sons of Michael Laudrup making the news. Mads Laudrup, 20, moved from FC Copenhagen to gain some first team experience at First Division side Herfolge, while 18-year-old Andreas stepped up to the Superliga to join FC Nordsjaelland from Lyngby.

FC Copenhagen, looking ahead to a UEFA Cup clash against Manchester City, signed Senegalese striker Dame N'Doye, who had been playing in the Greek Super League with OFI Crete.

Also active in the transfer market were Aalborg, who meet Deportivo La Coruna in the UEFA Cup. Among their acquisitions was young American forward Marcus Tracy.

Former Hamburg, Everton, Real Madrid and Celtic midfielder Thomas Gravesen, who won 66 caps for Denmark, has retired, while defender Martin Laursen has announced he is quitting international football at the age of 31, saying: "My knees can no longer stand me playing for Aston Villa as well as the national team." Laursen won 53 caps for Denmark.

Jim Holden

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

Italy calling...Fener's Diego Lugano has been tempted by Lazio but Semih Senturk (inset) has said no to Juventus

TURKEY

Big three ignore offers in window

ANYONE expecting high-profile signings by any of the country's big three would have been very disappointed during the transfer window.

Fenerbahce went on record to say they would prefer to sign young Turkish players for the future rather than big foreign names, while Galatasaray coach Michael Skibbe claimed his squad is strong enough to win trophies this season without any additions. Besiktas, meanwhile, need to get rid of Anthony Seric and Edouard Cisse before bringing in replacements.

Title hopefuls Sivasspor did probably the best bit of business in persuading striker Mehmet Yildiz to stay at least until the end of the season, while Trabzonspor bought Brazilian midfielder Alanzinho from Stabaek – where he was voted Norway's player of the year – for £3.67million. Alanzinho has signed a three-year deal.

Fenerbahce's Semih Senturk and Diego Lugano have reacted differently to offers from Italy. Turkey striker Semih turned down a move to Juventus at the start of the season, but Uruguay defender Lugano could be on his way to Lazio in June. One Fener player certainly going nowhere, however, is Brazilian full-back Roberto Carlos, who has signed a one-year extension.

Mehmet Demircan

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

SERBIA

Partizan in hiring mood

Title holders Partizan have been busy recruiting following the sale of Zoran Tosic and Adem Ljajic to Manchester United (though 17-year-old Ljajic will remain on loan in Belgrade until January 2010).

In came 6ft 8in Brazilian striker Washington from Macedonian club Makedonija, Rad forward Brana Ilic, midfielder Nikola Vujovic from Montenegro's Mogren, plus defenders Goran Gavrancic (free agent) and Aleksandar Kosoric (Slavija Sarajevo), while midfielder Dorde Lazic joined Metalurh Donetsk and injury-plagued striker Veljko Paunovic, 31, retired.

Ljupko Petrovic has rejoined Vojvodina as coach for a third time. Petrovic, who won the European Cup with Red Star in 1991, guided Vojvodina to their last championship back in 1989.

Borussia Dortmund's Neven Subotic has opted to play for Serbia. The 20-year-old central defender, who has played for the USA Under-17s and Under-20s, was also eligible for Germany, Bosnia-Herzegovina or Croatia.

Vladimir Novak

MONTENEGRO

Mogren's win double

Mogren midfielder Nikola Vujovic (who has since joined Partizan Belgrade) and coach Dejan Vukevic were named Player of the Year and Coach of the Year for 2008. Roma striker and national team captain Mirko Vucinic took the best foreign-based player award.

Buducnost strengthened their squad by signing Chad striker Misdongard Betoligar and central defender Goran Adamovic from Red Star Belgrade, plus midfielder Ivan Petrovic from Sloboda Uzice of Serbia.

Vladimir Novak

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Silver lining for Blazevic

National team coach Miroslav Blazevic will be without injured Hoffenheim striker Vedad Ibisevic for the home and away World Cup qualifiers against Belgium in March and April.

But there is some consolation in that 18-year-old Lyon midfielder Miralem Pjanic is back in the fold after breaking his right leg last August.

Blazevic has also appointed ex-Siroki Brijeg coach Ivica Barbaric to his staff. Croat Barbaric joins Serbian Borce Sredojevic and Enver Legusic, who is a Muslim, to complete that unwritten rule that football in the country must satisfy all three entities.

Zdravko Reic

SLOVENIA

New blood needed

With four of the national side's defenders out suspended, the country's football authorities continue to look abroad for new recruits.

One player under consideration is 21-year-old Nurnburg defender Dominic Maroh, who was born in Germany but has a Slovenian father.

Rudi Zavrl, FA president since 1989, is to step down. Vice-president Tugomir Frajman is favourite to succeed him.

Zdravko Reic

ISRAEL

League back after Gaza delay

The top three divisions resumed at the end of January following postponement during the three-week long military campaign in Gaza.

There had been safety worries in southern towns concerning rocket fire, and fear of sectarian violence between Jewish and Arab fans in other parts of the country, but once play got under way things passed largely without incident as Maccabi Haifa continued to top the Premier League. They held a four-point lead over Hapoel Tel Aviv, who seized second place on goal difference after beating Maccabi Netanya 2-1.

Speculation is still rife regarding the future of Beitar Jerusalem, who are in limbo after Russian billionaire owner Arkady Gaydamak left the country, saying he wanted to offload the club amid reported financial difficulties. Moshe Dadash, a previous chairman, has been approached about finding a new benefactor, while some players have been sold to help reduce the club's debts.

Derek Fattal

ALBANIA

Elbasani boss arrested

Arben Laze, the president behind Elbasani's 2006 Superliga triumph, was arrested after he and three others were caught transporting 1kg of heroin by a police anti-drugs operation.

With Laze facing a long spell in jail, the mayor of Elbasani has promised to cover the club's wage bill but the team will undoubtedly miss its most important benefactor, who has been in charge for the past four years.

Tirana club Partizani face disintegration after their president Albert Xhani was declared bankrupt. Many of the club's first team, who went eight months without being paid, have now left.

Gezim Nushi

MACEDONIA

Pacovski on top

Rabotnicki goalkeeper Tome Pacovski has been named player of the year.

Pacovski set a championship record of 790 minutes without conceding a goal as his club won the League and Cup double, before he moved to Vardar in June. Lazio striker Goran Pandev was named best overseas player.

Despite his stated desire not to experiment with new players, national coach Srecko Katanec gave in to media pressure and called up Sasa Ognenovski for the first time for February's friendly against Moldova in the Turkish resort of Antalya.

The Australian-born 29-year-old central defender, who played for Adelaide United in the recent Club World Cup, has chosen to represent his parents' homeland rather than the country of his birth.

Michel Stojmanovski

Glad to be back...Vejic has rejoined Split

GREECE

Kovacevic quits after health scare

Calling time on a much-travelled career...Darko Kovacevic

OLYMPIAKOS striker Darko Kovacevic has been forced to retire after undergoing emergency coronary surgery in Spain.

The 35-year-old Serb, diagnosed with high blood pressure and a narrowing of the arteries, was told by doctors that if he wants to lead a healthy, normal life he must forget about playing professional football again.

Much-travelled Kovacevic joined Olympiakos in the summer of 2007 following a second spell with Real Sociedad. He also played for Red Star Belgrade, Lazio, Juventus and Sheffield Wednesday, and was capped 55 times by the former Yugoslavia, scoring 10 goals and playing in the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000.

National team midfielder Stelios Giannakopoulos has returned home from Hull City and agreed a one-and-a-half year deal with Larissa. The 34-year-old midfielder moved on after just half a season with the English Premier League side following five seasons with Bolton Wanderers.

Striker Leon Knight, 26, who has spent most of his career in the English lower leagues, has signed a six-months contract with promoted Thrasyvoulos, while Panionios have signed Czech defender Martin Latka from Slavia Prague on a four-year deal.

Lou Economopoulos

CROATIA

Dinamo prepare for Split trip

THE NATIONAL League resumes on February 22 with the most eagerly awaited match since its inception in 1992.

Dinamo Zagreb, champions for the past three seasons and leaders by a point at the winter break, face a trip to second-place Hajduk Split.

Both sides have reinforcements. Hajduk signed Croatia Under-21 midfielder Marin Tomasov from bottom-of-the-table Zadar and welcomed back national team defender and former captain Hrvoje Vejic after four years with Russians Tom Tomsk.

Dinamo signed 21-year-old Argentinian midfielder Adrian Calello from Independiente for £2.83million and Sparta Prague's Czech Republic striker Miroslav Slepicka.

Robert Kovac, 34, is to follow older brother Niko's lead in retiring from international football. But coach Slaven Bilic sees age as no object and called up uncapped 33-year-old Ivan Juric, who plays for Genoa in Italy, for the friendly against Romania.

Zdravko Reic

UKRAINE

Clubs rein in spending

Start again...Castillo returned to Shakhtar

THE GLOBAL economic crisis had a huge impact on the winter transfer market with most clubs – including Shakhtar Donetsk and Dynamo Kyiv – unusually quiet and stuck with their existing squads.

Champions Shakhtar even sold their best player, Brazilian striker Brandao, to Marseille for £5.5million, and concentrated on recalling players from loan deals. Ukraine Under-21 striker Ruslan Fomin found his way home from Metalist Kharkiv, while Mexico's Nery Castillo returned after a miserable spell at Manchester City.

Castillo, known as "El Diablo", signed a five-year deal in July 2007 for a record £13.5m but made only six starts for his new club before he was dropped for refusing to allow his Italian team-mate Cristiano Lucarelli to take a penalty against Naftovyk Okhtyrka. After Castillo took the penalty himself and missed, the fans turned against him and he paid a substantial part of his own loan fee to help speed up his escape to the English Premier League.

A year later, Castillo, 24, has returned to Shakhtar a changed man. "I behaved terribly towards my team-mates and the supporters of Shakhtar," he admitted. "I owe them a lot and would like to repay them on the pitch. I want to assure Shakhtar fans that they will see soon in me a new better version."

Castillo took a first step towards his rehabilitation by helping the club win a pre-season tournament in Spain, where Shakhtar demolished Borussia Monchengladbach 3-0.

Elsewhere, Dynamo Kyiv swapped striker Kleber, who spent last year in Brazil on loan at Palmeiras, for Cruzeiro's promising forward Guilherme, while Metalist Kharkiv signed Argentina Under-20 midfielder Walter Acevedo on a year's loan from San Lorenzo.

Valeriy Bukayev, president of Zorya Luhansk, died after a long illness, aged 33.

Oleg Zadernovsky

POLAND

Chaos at the PZPN

Deep-rooted problems in Polish football remain after a special meeting of the FA (PZPN) ended in chaos.

A meeting to discuss changes to the PZPN's statutes was intended to be the final stage in the "road map" process established by FIFA, UEFA and the government last year. But nothing was resolved and it ended with allegations that delegates had been intimidated.

A few days before the meeting, one delegate, Kazimierz Gren, said he would "tell the whole shocking truth about Polish football during the meeting". He went on to declare he was "really afraid of my life" but then remained silent at the meeting. Gren had formerly been a close associate of recently elected PZPN chairman Grzegorz Lato.

Ryszard Adamus, who stepped down as an FA board member in December "because of threats", accused the PZPN of acting like the "mafia", adding: "They threatened me and said that I should be happy because in the past somebody would have shot me in the knees!"

Lato called the allegations "farcical", but the minister of sport, Miroslaw Drzewiecki, said a prosecutor should investigate the revelations, so the whole matter could end up in court.

Dariusz Kurowski

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CZECH REPUBLIC

Sparta ring the changes

Sparta Prague coach Jozef Chovanec has begun rebuilding following a disappointing autumn.

Putting an emphasis on youth, he signed Czech defender Roman Hubnik (FC Moscow) and Croatian wing-back Manuel Pamic (Red Bull Salzburg) on loan, and signed German winger Sergio Peter (Blackburn Rovers) and Slovak midfielder Juraj Kucka (Ruzomberok) on permanent deals. Several players also left the club.

Following the departure of striker Tomas Necid to CSKA Moscow, Slavia have picked up three new forwards, bringing Pavel Fort back on loan from Toulouse, Tomas Pekhart on loan from Tottenham and signing Ales Besta from Brno. Slovakia wing-back Matej Krajcik left for Italian side Reggina.

Second-placed Mlada Boleslav will be without Czech international Jan Rajnoch who has joined German club Energie Cottbus.

Sam Beckwith

KAZAKHSTAN

Astana pull out

Astana, one of the country's most successful clubs, have pulled out of the forthcoming Supreme League campaign because of heavy debts.

Aktobe defender and national captain Samat Smakov was voted the country's Player of the Year.

Oleg Zadernovsky

HUNGARY

Money men eye Vasas

Italian investors have expressed interest in buying a major share in Vasas, who last won the title in 1997.

Under promising young manager Geza Meszoly, son of the international half-back Kalman who captained the club in their glory days of the 1960s, the club enjoyed a purple patch in the autumn. Vasas' great rivals Ujpest – where Meszoly junior earned his spurs as a coach – have even rented the club's training ground. "We're proud of that," said Meszoly. "When I left Ujpest for Vasas, many said that Ujpest must be ahead of us in terms of training facilities – not a bit of it."

Peterjon Cresswell

ROMANIA

Radoi quits for Saudi cash

Steaua Bucharest captain and national team defender Mirel Radoi has signed for Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal.

The £5.5million fee is the biggest ever received by a Romanian club will provide a welcome financial boost for Steaua who have struggled to pay players' wages.

Radu Timofte

Take five...Berbatov

RUSSIA

Zico takes over at CSKA

CSKA Moscow's new coach Zico has inherited "a team wrapped in gold" according to Valeri Gazzaev, who stepped down after the club's last game of 2008.

Zico has signed a three-year deal with CSKA and his appointment is quite a coup for president Evgeni Giner. The 55-year-old Brazilian has had coaching spells in Japan, Turkey (where he took Fenerbahce to the Champions League quarter-finals) and, most recently, Uzbekistan, where he led Bunyodkor to a domestic double. His success had evidently not gone unnoticed by Giner.

Gazzaev had originally announced his intention to quit as far back as July when CSKA lost their place in the title race to surprise league leaders Rubin Kazan. Giner talked his old friend Gazzaev into staying until the end of the season, and CSKA eventually recovered to finish as runners-up, but it was an unsatisfactory result for the three-times champions and 2005 UEFA Cup winners.

Ironically, Gazzaev confirmed his departure after CSKA's 4-3 away win over Nancy to complete a 100 per cent record in the UEFA Cup group stage. Vagner Love's hat-trick against Nancy sealed an outstanding season for the Brazil international, who was voted the 2008 Russian Footballer of the Year by Premier Liga players. He also won the top goalscorer award after netting 20 goals in 26 league games.

The 24-year-old's form led many to predict his departure for one of Europe's top clubs during the winter break. However the appointment of Zico was a clear sign from CSKA owners that the club will continue to rely on Brazilian talent and the player insisted he was happy to stay.

Zico has made no secret of his plans to restore the Brazilian community which brought CSKA European glory four years ago and midfielder Daniel Carvalho was recalled from his loan spell at Internacional. More South American signings look set to follow.

In the meantime, Rubin neglected the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) Cup by taking a reserve squad to Moscow for the 17th edition of the annual tournament for the champions of former Soviet republics. Ukraine's Shakhtar Donetsk followed their example and the indoor tournament, traditionally attended by FIFA and UEFA presidents, was won by Moldova's Sheriff.

Victor Gusev

Back in Europe...Zico

BULGARIA

High five for Berbatov

DIMITAR BERBATOV has equalled the achievement of Hristo Stoichkov by being voted the country's Player of the Year for a fifth time. In a surprise move, Stoichkov attended the awards ceremony and presented the award to the Manchester United star in person.

CSKA Sofia have new owners after Pramod Mittal sold out to waste disposal company Titan. However, fans expressed their anger at the continued involvement of club director Alexander Tomov, who has been accused of appropriating £16million from the Indian's steel business, Kremikovtsi.

Former Bulgaria international Krassimir Balakov has returned home after 18 years abroad. Balakov spent time as a player in Portugal (Sporting) and Germany (Stuttgart), and was later a coach in Switzerland (Grasshopper and St Gallen). He has now signed a five-year contract to take charge at Chernomorets.

Borislav Mikhailov was re-elected unopposed as president of the Bulgarian Football Union after the only other candidate, Ivaylo Drazhev, from Asenovets, withdrew from the election.

Rumen Paytashev

LIBERTADORES CUP PREVIEW

The glittering prize

Club-by-club guide to South America's leading club competition

Boca boys...Palermo (left) and Riquelme

IT DOESN'T have the big names, the state-of-the-art stadiums or the multimillion-dollar television contracts of UEFA's Champions League. And a lot of commentators were haughtily dismissive of reigning champions LDU's performance in the Club World Cup Final – even though they gave Manchester United more of a run for their money than many infinitely wealthier English Premiership sides.

However, the Libertadores Cup still remains an extremely palatable alternative to its more glamorous European counterpart.

The much-vaunted "hell" of some of the Turkish venues looks like a vicar's tea party compared to the passionate atmosphere stirred up by the fans of Nacional, Estudiantes, Boca Juniors and Colo Colo, to name but a few.

Meanwhile, observers will get a sneak preview of some raw South American talents before they are whisked off to Europe, and the contest is refreshingly open – only 16 of the 38 teams who took part last year will be featuring this time around and none of the 11 countries will have exactly the same representatives.

The format remains the same: 12 teams take part in a preliminary round, with the six winners joining the other 26 sides in the group stage. The top two in each go through, and after that it is a straightforward knockout competition.

A few little idiosyncrasies remain, such as the presence of Mexican clubs (who are selected by a bizarre mini-tournament held in the United States rather than by their performance in the domestic championship) and the idea of hitting clubs with a $100 (£70) fine, rather than an automatic suspension, when a player receives two bookings.

Brian Homewood

THE CONTENDERS

BOCA JUNIORS
Attempting to equal Independiente's record of seven titles, Boca have kept the bulk of the team that won Argentina's opening championship in December, including mercurial playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme, and should welcome back stalwart striker Martin Palermo from injury during the course of the tournament. Coached by Carlos Ischia, they also have the backing of the feared *La Bombonera* stadium.

SAO PAULO
Brazilian champions for the last three seasons and Libertadores quarter-finalists last year. Few teams on the continent can live with their physical prowess and, although they are hardly entertaining to watch, grumpy coach Muricy Ramalho has put together a side of brutal efficiency.

GREMIO
Runners-up in 2007, Gremio are another very physical Brazilian outfit. The Porto Alegre club – where Big Phil Scolari made his name during the 1990s – also enjoy fanatical backing and are what Brazilians call *time copeiro* (cup specialists).

PALMEIRAS
Coach Vanderlei Luxemburgo has won the Brazilian championship five times with four different teams but the Libertadores has always eluded him. Although he insists it doesn't bother him, few observers are convinced and the club has strengthened its squad, bringing in Colombian full-back Pablo Armero, Brazil World Cup winner Edmilson and midfielder Keirrison, who was a revelation last year at Coritiba. Palmeiras previously won the Libertadores under Luxemburgo's nemesis, Scolari, 10 years ago.

GUADALAJARA
Their experience in the competition and the relative stability of the Mexican-only squad makes the Chivas the best bet to bring the trophy to their country for the first time. Despite reports that flamboyant owner Jorge Vergara had wanted to bring in Dutchman Ronald Koeman as coach, he has stuck by Efrain Flores and has strengthened the squad by repatriating Aaron Galindo from Eintracht Frankfurt and signing striker Jared Borgetti, Mexico's all-time record scorer.

SAN LORENZO
Denied the 2008 Argentinian opening championship by a quirk in the rules, San Lorenzo played some enterprising football under phlegmatic coach Miguel Angel Russo. Boosted by the invention of playmaker Pablo Barrientos, the stinging free-kicks of Aureliano Torres and the experience of Santiago Solari, they could well improve on last year's run to the quarter-finals.

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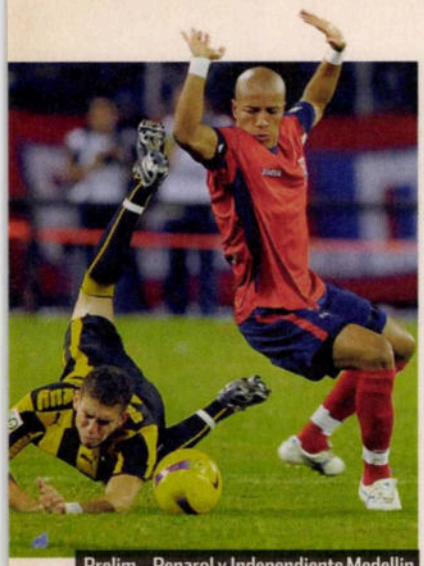

Prelim...Penarol v Independiente Medellin

POTENTIAL SURPRISES

CRUZEIRO
The Brazilian side would normally be among the contenders, but they may regret selling off their two brightest stars, Ramires and Guilherme.

COLO COLO
The only Chilean team to have won the tournament (1991), Colo Colo have won five of the last six Chilean titles. Their failure to find a buyer for Argentinian striker Lucas Barrios, scorer of 37 goals last season, may boost their chances.

AMERICA
The Red Devils from Cali reached three successive Libertadores Finals in the 1980s, losing them all, and another in 1996, which they also lost. Since then, however, they have been blacklisted for allowing drug traffickers to become involved in the club, and prevented from having sponsorship or even bank accounts. However, they are trying to clean up their act and won last year's Colombian closing championship.

ESTUDIANTES
Heavily dependant on Juan Sebastian Veron in midfield, the Argentinian team could mount a challenge if he continues to produce the form which saw him win the Latin American Player of the Year award for 2008.

PACHUCA
The Mexican side are one of the best-run clubs in Latin America and winners of the CONCACAF Champions Cup twice in a row.

LIBERTAD
Have dominated Paraguayan football recently, winning four successive domestic titles. They reached the quarter-finals in 2007, when they lost to eventual champions Boca Juniors.

OUTSIDERS

RIVER PLATE
For all their pedigree, River's recent performances have been disastrous. Bottom of the Argentinian opening championship last year, they were knocked out of the Libertadores by nine-man San Lorenzo. In 2007, they even failed to progress beyond the group stage.

SPORT RECIFE
Qualified by winning the Brazilian Cup, although their campaign was marred by allegations of dirty tricks at home games, with visiting teams complaining about being kept awake at night by supporters in front of the hotel.

INDEPENDIENTE MEDELLIN
Coached by Santiago Escobar, whose brother Andres was murdered after scoring an own goal at the 1994 World Cup. The Colombians are something of an unknown quantity, although defender Samuel Vanegas won the competition with Once Caldas in 2004 and Aldo Bobadilla played in goal for Paraguay at the last World Cup.

PENAROL
The five-times champions are a sad reflection of their former selves. The appointment of volatile Julio Ribas for a second stint as coach (he was jailed for eight days during his first stint for his part in a brawl on the field) could provide some fireworks but is unlikely to make them title challengers.

UNIVERSITARIO
The Peruvians were due to be consigned to the no-hopers category until they somehow managed to persuade Nolberto Solano to return to his homeland and join them.

UNIVERSIDAD SAN MARTIN
Peruvian champions for the second year running and by far the best organised outfit in the country.

NACIONAL
Gave Libertad a run for their money in Paraguay's closing championship. A decent counter-attacking team.

CARACAS
Although Venezuela have never won the Libertadores, Caracas beat River Plate home and away in the group stage two years ago and gave Santos an almighty fright in the second round before losing 5-4 on aggregate.

UNIVERSIDAD DE CHILE
Taking part for the first time since 2005. Coach Sergio Markarian is a wily campaigner.

NACIONAL
Their cauldron-like Parque Central stadium is one of the tournament's more colourful sights. However, the three-times former champions have suffered with Uruguay's decline.

DEFENSOR SPORTING
The reigning Uruguayan champions reached the quarter-finals in 2007. They tend to live up to their name with a cautious approach.

LDU
The defending champions have lost key players Joffre Guerron, Luis Bolanos and Enrique Vera since last year. Coach Edgardo "Big Foot" Bauza has also left the Ecuadorians and they no longer have the surprise factor.

LANUS
Argentinian football has seen a recent shift in the balance of power with Buenos Aires suburban teams such as Lanus, Arsenal and Banfield qualifying for the Libertadores instead of the likes of Independiente and Velez Sarsfield. However, these teams' performances at international level have been poor.

EVERTON
Qualified by winning the Chilean opening championship but fell away badly in the closing tournament. Coach Nelson Acosta led Chile on their last World Cup appearance in 1998.

SAN LUIS
One of the most impressive teams in last year's Mexican opening championship, the team has since been dismantled by owners Televisa.

NO-HOPERS

SPORTING CRISTAL
Juan Carlos Oblitas is one of Peru's most respected coaches but there is nothing to suggest Sporting can rise above the nation's recent mediocrity. They already hold a record of 20 first or preliminary round eliminations.

DEPORTIVO CUENCA
The Ecuadorians have fallen at the first hurdle on all five appearances.

EL NACIONAL
Suffer from a lack of support in Ecuador and their home games in a usually empty Atahualpa stadium are a depressing experience.

DEPORTIVO QUITO
The Ecuadorian champions have an ageing squad.

GUARANI
Paraguayan side who are taking part for the first time.

DEPORTIVO ANZOATEGUI
Venezuelan team who are also taking part for the first time.

DEPORTIVO TACHIRA
The reigning Venezuelan champions have slightly more pedigree but not enough to trouble the bigger teams.

REAL POTOSI
The Bolivians play at 14,000ft above sea level but have never progressed beyond the group stage.

UNIVERSITARIO DE SUCRE
A provincial Bolivian club with precious little international experience.

AURORA
Unlikely to change Bolivia's record of never having won the Libertadores.

BOYACA CHICO
Won the Columbia opening championship but finished near the bottom of the closing championship.

Early action...Estudiantes' Veron (left) takes on Antonio Lizarbe of Sporting Cristal

PERU

Nobby comes home

NOLBERTO SOLANO has decided to return to his homeland and play for Universitario in a move which has taken Peruvian football by storm.

Solano was inspired by the appointment of his close friend Jose Reynoso as coach, though many wondered how Universitario could possibly afford the former Boca Juniors, Newcastle and Aston Villa midfielder after struggling to pay their players last season. The club said that new sponsorship deals had been signed.

Solano, 34, returns with Peruvian football at a low ebb, having nearly been kicked out of international football because of alleged interference by the government in the national federation. FIFA suspended Peru for one month as a warning last year but re-admitted the country after the government and the federation reluctantly agreed to hold talks.

Another big talking point is just how the 2009 championship works. The system is so complicated that newspapers presented differing versions, none of which has officially been confirmed by the league.

But the consensus seems to be this: the 16 teams will play each other twice, at the end of which they will be re-distributed into two groups of eight (the teams which finished in odd-numbered positions go into one group, and the even-numbered finishers in the other). The group winners meet in the end-of-season Final.

Most versions said that the teams will carry their points total through to the group stage but one claimed they would start from scratch – which would make the first 30 rounds of games utterly pointless.

Other variations were offered on this theme. According to one, only the top eight teams would qualify for the group stage. Another said the top eight would go into one group, to decide the title, with the remainder in another, which would decide relegation.

The championship, at least, will be a truly national event following the promotion of CNI de Iquitos, who are from the Amazon region, and Sport Huancayo and Inti Gas Deportes, both based in the central highlands.

Brian Homewood

Comfort zone...Solano was influenced to join Universitario by the appointment of close friend Jose Reynoso as coach

Fiery...Ribas is back at Penarol

URUGUAY

Unfinished business

URUGUAY, where the season follows the European August-July model, will start at the finish when the teams return from their summer break.

Bizarrely, the first weekend will feature the deciding round of matches from the 2008-09 championship's first stage, which was supposed to have finished in December. The entire final round, however, was called off at 48 hours' notice because police were unhappy with security arrangements for Penarol's visit to Danubio, one of the four contenders to win the stage.

The match has now been given the green light and Danubio start level on 29 points with Nacional, while Racing Club and Defensor Sporting are two points behind. Once that is out of the way, the second stage will begin, at the end of which a complicated formula decides who meets who in the play-offs.

Penarol, strugglers in recent years, have brought firebrand coach Julio Ribas back for a second stint. Ribas did win a title during his previous spell in charge but the coach, who refers to his players as gladiators, also spent eight days in jail for his part in a brawl on the pitch following a derby against Nacional.

Brian Homewood

COLOMBIA

Cash-strapped Tolima play on

Deportes Tolima threatened to pull out of the 2009 season after the brewery which had sponsored them last year decided not to renew the contract, leaving them with serious financial problems. Eventually, they reluctantly agreed to play after being threatened with long-term suspension and fines.

Club president Gabriel Camargo said Tolima's income was only around 40 per cent of what was needed to finance the team and appealed to the local government for help.

Jose Hernandez, who led Deportivo Cali to the Libertadores Cup Final in 1999, has returned for a new stint nine years on while eccentric former Colombia coach and one-time chemical engineer Javier Alvarez is back for a third spell at Caldas.

Brian Homewood

ECUADOR

New season, new format

A new, and almost incomprehensible, format for the 2009 championship features three stages followed by a Final.

In the first stage, the 12 teams play each other twice and the top four qualify for the third stage to which they also carry through bonus points. In the second stage, there are two groups of six and the top two in each also qualify for the third stage. Should one of these have qualified from the first stage, the next best team go through. Again, bonus points are awarded.

In the third stage, the two group winners meet over two legs for the title – the first time Ecuador has had a Final.

Brian Homewood

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

CONFEDERATION CUP

Sfaxien win all-Tunisian decider

CS SFAXIEN held onto their African Confederation Cup title, beating rivals Etoile Sahel on the away-goals rule.

Despite Sfaxien being the title holders, Sahel went into the two-leg Final as favourites and with the extraordinary record of having reached the Final of an African club competition every year since 2003, when they won the African Cup-winners Cup.

Sahel had set out at the start of 2008 to defend their African Champions League crown but were surprisingly eliminated in the last knockout round before the group stage, which put them in the Confederation Cup in much the same way teams drop out of the group phase of the UEFA Champions League and go into the UEFA Cup.

However, after coming through a tough group, Etoile sacked their Swiss coach, Michel Decastel, less than a week before the Confederation Cup Final. Decastel had taken Sfaxien to the title in 2007 before he jumped ship to join Etoile. But when his new side dropped a few points in the early stages of the League, Decastel – who has since joined Zamalek – was shown the door.

In his stead came Herve Gauthier, a Frenchman serving as the club's technical director, and his hopes of a caretaker role being made permanent received a major boost when Etoile travelled to Sfax for the first leg of the Final and came away with a well-fought goalless draw.

But two weeks later Sfaxien caught Etoile on the hop at their home ground in Sousse and opened the scoring in the second leg of the Final after just three minutes through Ghanaian striker Agyemang Opoku (who has since been sold to Al Sadd of Qatar).

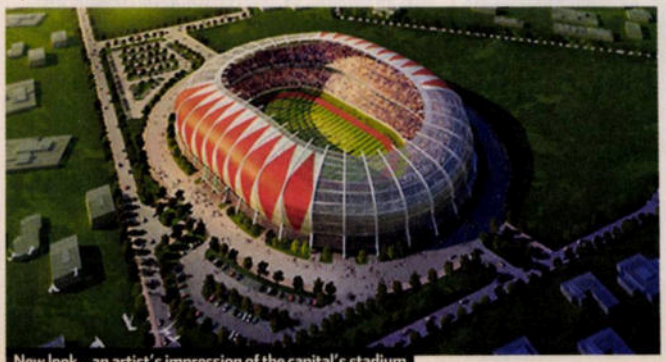
Emeka Opara, who returned to Etoile at the start of the season after a stint in Germany with Kaiserslautern, levelled just before the hour but Sfaxien bounced back in the 74th minute to regain the lead through Abdelkarim Nafti. Five minutes later, Aymen Abdennour equalised for Etoile to set up a dramatic last 10 minutes of furious attacks which the visitors successfully repulsed.

Gauthier found himself accosted by furious fans at the final whistle and within a week Etoile had signed Franco-German Gernot Rohr as their latest coach.

Mark Gleeson

Cup holders...skipper Issam Merdassi lifts the trophy

Angola on course for Nations Cup



New look...an artist's impression of the capital's stadium

THE CONSTRUCTION of the four stadiums to be used for the African Nations Cup finals in Angola will be completed between September and October according to the tournament's local organising committee.

New stadiums are being built in Benguela, Cabinda, Lubango and the capital Luanda for the 16-team tournament, which starts on January 10, 2010, and the venues are being constructed in record time by Chinese contractors.

However, the event is still expected to be hampered by the lack of facilities such as hotels and telecommunications.

Angola, despite its massive oil wealth, is still slowly recovering from a long-standing civil war which devastated the country's infrastructure.

In the past the country has hosted African basketball and handball championships, but nothing that compares to the scale of the Nations Cup – which will have added attention because it comes just six months before the World Cup in South Africa.

Mark Gleeson

JAPAN

Gamba's last-gasp Emperor's Cup win

GAMBA OSAKA earned the right to defend their Champions League title by beating Kashiwa Reysol 1-0 in the Emperor's Cup Final on the last day of the Japanese season. Ryuji Bando scored the winner with only four minutes of extra time remaining, after a string of fine saves by Gamba keeper Yosuke Fujigaya had kept the Asian Champions in the game.

It was a fitting finish to an extraordinary season in which Gamba also won the inaugural Pan-Pacific Championship and came third at the Club World Cup.

"I am overjoyed," said Gamba manager Akira Nishino. "We have had a lot of hard matches this year and my players were tired, but it was the determination to win that got us here."

It was Gamba's longest-ever season (61 games) and the scars were showing by the end. They had also eked out a narrow 1-0 win in extra time in the semi-final, against Yokohama F-Marinos, and playmaker Yasuhito Endo was carrying an ankle injury in the Final.

Gamba lost no time strengthening their squad for this year, bringing in South Korea and former Shimizu S-Pulse centre-forward Cho Jae-Jin from K-League club Jeonbuk Motors; speedy, hard-working Brazilian striker Leandro from Vissel Kobe; and Shimizu S-Pulse defender Kazumichi Takagi, who made his Japan debut last August.

The Japan Football Association has indicated its desire to bid for the 2018 or 2022 World Cup, though either would depend on Tokyo winning its bid for the 2016 Olympic Games because, at present, that is the only way for Japan to acquire the requisite 80,000-capacity stadium. The Nissan Stadium in Yokohama, which hosted the 2002 World Cup Final, seats only 70,000. The current feeling is that 2022 is the more realistic date.

Mike Plastow and Yumiko Nagae

Regal finish...Bando scores the winner in the Emperor's Cup Final

Hanoi rocks...at least four people died during victory celebrations

AFF SUZUKI CUP

Victory for Vietnam

LE CONG VINH'S late header earned Vietnam a first-ever ASEAN Football Federation title as a 1-1 draw in the second leg of the Final with Thailand in Hanoi handed Henri Calisto's team the Suzuki Cup.

With what was effectively the last touch of the game, Cong Vinh's injury-time effort from Phan Van Tai Em's free-kick looped over Thai keeper Kosin Hathairattanakool to give Vietnam a 3-2 aggregate win. It sparked remarkable scenes around the My Dinh National Stadium as fans celebrated Vietnam's first win in the competition, 10 years after losing to Singapore in their only other appearance in the Final.

"I'm feeling overjoyed at the moment. And we will have a private celebration with the players and with those who are close to us," said Calisto. "But the difference with this team is that they believe in themselves and they fought all the way until the end."

Vietnam, long seen as South East Asian football's great underachievers, had gone into the game leading 2-1 on aggregate after the first leg in Bangkok, but Peter Reid's Thai team levelled the overall score when, in the 20th minute, Teerasil Dangda rose high to head Sutee Suksomkit's cross beyond Duong Hong Son and silence the 40,000 fans.

Doan Viet Cuong went close for Vietnam, while Suchao Nutnum missed a good chance for the visitors after 14 minutes, before Teerasil gave Thailand the lead on the night.

With the 90 minutes up and the game well into the three minutes of injury time added by the referee, Cong Vinh was brought down on the left side of the Thailand penalty area by Suree Sukha.

From Tai Em's free-kick, the nation's most popular player guaranteed his place in the annals of Vietnamese football when he ran towards the near post and scored with a glancing, backwards header.

"It was a difficult game all the way until the last minute. It was a cruel blow but, hopefully, we will learn from it," said Reid after watching his team fail to add to Thailand's three past victories in the competition.

Michael Church

AUSTRALIA

Adelaide pipped to top spot by Melbourne Victory

Despite winning 1-0 at fourth-placed Central Coast Mariners, previous leaders Adelaide United were still overtaken by Melbourne Victory during the regular season's concluding weekend and pipped for the A-League minor premiership title.

Victory and United finished level on points with an identical goal difference, but the former snatched top spot through having scored more goals. The 89th-minute strike by Archie Thompson in the Melburnians' last game, a 2-0 win over Wellington Phoenix, was, therefore, crucial.

Victory, along with Adelaide United, Central Coast Mariners and Queensland Roar, go on to contest the A-League finals stages.

Thompson was one of eight survivors from the Melbourne side which hammered the south Australians 6-0 in the 2007 Grand Final. Losing influential Brazilian midfielder Fred was largely responsible for Victory slumping to fifth last year.

However, Costa Rican replacement Carlos Hernandez's greatly improved form and fitness, plus the recruitment of Billy Celeski and Tom Pondeljak from Perth Glory and the Mariners respectively, have seen Victory regain their potency.

Celeski and Pondeljak, as well as four members of Victory's "Old Brigade" – Thompson, Danny Allsopp, Michael Theoklitos and Rodrigo Vargas – were all included in the Australia national squad for the Asian Cup qualifier against Indonesia in Jakarta which ended 0-0.

Paul Moon

ASIAN CUP QUALIFYING

Poor start for China's Yin

Yin Tiesheng, the man who oversaw China's poor showing in the 2008 Olympic football tournament, kicked off his tenure as national team coach with a 3-2 loss to Syria. However, Yin and his team made amends a week later when they thrashed newly crowned South East Asian champions Vietnam 6-1.

Thailand picked up a credible 0-0 draw against Jordan in Amman but there was no such joy for former ASEAN champions Singapore, who were soundly beaten 6-0 by Iran.

Japan earned a 2-1 win over Yemen and Bahrain eased past Hong Kong with a 3-1 victory. Oman were held to a 0-0 draw by Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates thrashed Malaysia 5-0.

The top two teams in each group will qualify for the finals.

Michael Church

OCEANIA

Player award revived

In a surprise move, the Oceania Football Confederation resurrected the region's Footballer of the Year award – which was dropped in 2004 – and named winners for the past three years.

Confederation general secretary Tai Nicholas said that the ballot would be revived "in the interest of continuity" and the retrospective winners were Marama Vahirua (2005), Ryan Nelsen (2006) and Shane Smeltz (2007).

Few would argue with the credentials of Tahitian Vahirua, then a first-team regular at Nice, or Blackburn Rovers' Nelsen. But Smeltz's award for a year in which he spent a large chunk of his time on the Halifax Town subs' bench raised a few eyebrows.

The 2008 winner will be announced in April.

Paul Moon

GULF CUP

Oman no longer the nearly men

OMAN, runners-up in the two previous competitions, beat Saudi Arabia 6-5 in a penalty shoot-out to win the Gulf Cup.

Oman hit the woodwork twice, through Ismail Al-Ajmi and Imad Al-Hosni, but were unable to find the back of the net in either regulation or extra time.

However, after losing out to Qatar in 2005 and the United Arab Emirates two years later, Oman lifted the trophy in front of their own fans in the capital Muscat, ensuring the competition has been won three times in a row by the host nation.

"I was confident that we would win the title after the motivation, desire and excitement I saw in the players before and during the tournament, in addition to the good performances we had," said Oman's French coach, Claude Le Roy.

"The tournament was not easy for any team as the Asian champions Iraq and the defending champions UAE were knocked out in the first [group stage] round. The level we saw in these matches shows how good the teams in the Gulf region are.

"There are a lot of players in the Oman national team who deserve to play in Europe because they have a lot of skills which would allow them to play with different teams around Europe.

"I hope we can continue with the same motivation and desire to win more titles in the next period especially because we have a lot of talent. I'm really proud of this team and these players."

Michael Church

Third time lucky...success for Oman

ROUND-UP

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

ASIA

- Abahani beat arch-rivals Mohammedan 2-1 to remain on track to retain their league title in BANGLADESH. Abahani are top of the table with 44 points from 18 games.
- Selangor won their first silverware of 2009 in MALAYSIA when they beat Kedah 4-1 in their opening match of the Super League. The win allowed Selangor to win the Charity Shield, which is the curtain-raiser to the league season.
- Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the country's former president, said football clubs in Iran will be handed over to the private sector in the near future according to article 44 of the Iranian Constitution. Elsewhere, Peru international midfielder Paulo Rinaldo has joined Tehran-based Esteghlal from Sporting Cristal of Lima on an 18-month contract.
- Al-Ittihad widened the gap with Al-Hilal and remained top of the league in SAUDI ARABIA with 40 points following their important 1-0 win against Nasr.
- Cho Chung-yun is the 51st president of the FA in SOUTH KOREA. Cho will succeed Chung Mong-joon, who is a FIFA vice-president and has led the KFA since 1993. Cho will head the country's football governing body for the next four years.
- Vasco caused a major upset by beating Sporting Clube de Goa 1-0 to register only their second win of the I-League in INDIA. Sporting Clube de Goa remain top with 28 points from 13 matches, keeping them one point ahead of Calcutta giants Mohun Bagan.
- In MYANMAR, Finance & Revenue are at the top of the Premier League in the new season with seven points from two wins and a draw.

Azam Mahmood

Treble-teamed...Zanzibar captain Abdi Kassim tries to elude the attentions of a posse of Somalians during their opening group game of the CECAFA Cup

Zanzibar's Cup aim

THE ZANZIBAR Football Association is considering a bid to host next year's Council of East and Central Africa FA (CECAFA) Cup.

The decision came after the latest CECAFA Cup in Uganda, where Zanzibar were in the running for a semi-final place right to the wire. Zanzibar sports administrator Ally Saleh said: "We wanted 2009 but were told Kenya would host, so we might choose 2010 or if Kenya drops the bid [then this year]."

The 32nd CECAFA Cup was scheduled for November but delayed because of a number of changes. Ethiopia were omitted through FIFA suspension while Eritrea withdrew due to administrative problems at home and were replaced by Zambia.

Ten teams took part and Zanzibar kicked off Group A by beating Somalia 2-0 at the Nelson Mandela National Stadium in Kampala. Central defender Aggrey Morris scored in the 23rd minute and then added a last-minute penalty.

Unlike some countries, hosts Uganda chose to play their strongest team and called up professionals playing abroad. They thrashed Rwanda 4-0 in their opener but were held 0-0 by Zanzibar in the next match.

Zanzibar's third and biggest game was against the island's political masters, Tanzania.

The formation of the ZFA pre-dates the island's 1964 merger with the former British colony of Tanganyika to create Tanzania by 38 years. Zanzibar is an associate member of the Confederation of African Football and tried for FIFA membership in 2005 but was rejected when FIFA told the ZFA's clubs to take the ferry and play in Tanzania.

The ZFA remains a CAF associate member but the CECAFA Cup is the national team's only international outing.

Tanzania took the lead after 13 minutes through Danny Mrwanda but Nadir Haroub, a central defender who plays for Tanzanian champions Young Africans equalised for Zanzibar eight minutes later. However, Athumani Idd broke Zanzibar's hearts by scoring the winner with 12 minutes left.

Zanzibar could still have qualified for the semi-finals had they beaten Rwanda in their final group game but they went down 3-0.

Uganda went on to win the tournament, beating Kenya 1-0 in the Final, with Tanzania finishing third after a 3-2 win over Burundi.

The competition is the successor to the Gossage Cup, which was first held in 1926 and sponsored by soap manufacturer William Gossage. It lasted 40 years and was briefly succeeded by the East & Central African Senior Challenge Cup before the first CECAFA Cup was held in 1973, which Uganda also hosted and won.

Zanzibar, hosts in 1976 and 1990, won it in 1995, beating Uganda's B team 1-0. With no prospect of FIFA changing its mind over the island's admittance, hosting the CECAFA Cup remains the ZFA's biggest ambition.

Steve Menary

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

INTERNATIONALS

CECAFA CUP

(Council of East and Central Africa Football Associations)

In Kampala, Uganda

Group A

Jan 1
Zanzibar 2 (Morris 23, pen 90)
Somalia 0
HT: 1-0

Jan 1
Rwanda 0
Uganda 4 (Mawejje 59, Masaba pen 67, Omwony 85, Bengo 87)
HT: 0-0

Jan 3
Uganda 0
Zanzibar 0

Jan 3
Somalia 1 (Abshir 14)
Tanzania 0
HT: 1-0

Jan 5
Tanzania 2 (Mrwanda 13, Iddy 78)
Zanzibar 1 (Haroud 21)
HT: 1-1

Jan 5
Rwanda 3 (Gasana 20, 40, Bokota 64)
Somalia 0
HT: 2-0

Jan 7
Uganda 4 (Mawejje 31, 65, Kasule 40, Massa 75)
Somalia 0
HT: 2-0

Jan 7
Rwanda 0
Tanzania 2 (Ngassa 10, Iddy 44)
HT: 0-2

Jan 9
Uganda 2 (Omwony 11, Bengo 27)
Tanzania 1 (Swedi pen 47)
HT: 2-0

Jan 9
Rwanda 3 (Lomani 12, Hakiri 17, Gasana 39)
Zanzibar 0
HT: 3-0

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uganda	4	3	1	0	10	1	10
Tanzania	4	2	0	2	5	4	6
Rwanda	4	2	0	2	6	6	6
Zanzibar	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Somalia	4	1	0	3	1	9	3

Group B

Dec 31
Sudan 0
Kenya 0

Dec 31
Zambia 3 (Singuluma 25, 40, Sakuwaha 43)
Djibouti 0
HT: 3-0

Jan 2
Kenya 0
Zambia 0

Jan 2
Djibouti 0
Burundi 4 (Gatoto 5, 58, Nahimana 56, 78)
HT: 0-1
Sent off: Marene (Djibouti) 67min

Jan 4
Sudan 1 (El-Mahi 16)
Djibouti 1 (Dahir 53)
HT: 1-0

Jan 4
Zambia 1 (Kola 60)
Burundi 1 (Nahimana 90)
HT: 0-0
Sent off: Hatchipuka (Zambia) 72min

Jan 6
Djibouti 1 (Dahir 60)
Kenya 5 (Ouma 4, 29, 90+, Shikokoti 57, Owino 90)
HT: 0-2

Jan 6
Burundi 1 (Gatoto 8)
Sudan 0
HT: 1-0

Jan 8
Zambia 0
Sudan 2 (Amarria 29, El-Mahi 60)
HT: 0-1

Jan 8
Burundi 0
Kenya 1 (Monday pen 60)
HT: 0-0

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kenya	4	2	2	0	6	1	8
Burundi	4	2	1	1	6	2	7
Zambia	4	1	2	1	4	3	5
Sudan	4	1	2	1	3	2	5
Djibouti	4	0	1	3	2	13	1

Semi-finals

Jan 11
Kenya 2 (Ouma 18, Baraza 21)
Tanzania 1 (Mrwanda 79)
HT: 2-0

Jan 11
Uganda 5 (Omwony 29, 90, Mwesigwa 45, Bengo 47, Massa 67)
Burundi 0
HT: 2-0

Third-place play-off

Jan 13
Tanzania 3 (Ngassa 2, Tegete 68, Mrwanda 73)
Burundi 2 (Irambona pen 4, Jumapili 42)
HT: 1-2

Final

Jan 13
Kenya 0
Uganda 1 (Omwony 16)
HT: 0-1

GULF CUP

In Oman

Group A

Jan 4 - Muscat
Oman 0
Kuwait 0

Jan 4 - Muscat
Iraq 1 (Younis pen 81)
Bahrain 3 (Omar 28, Adnan pen 69, Al-Dakheel 90)
HT: 0-1
Sent off: Haitham 25min, Nour 65min (both Iraq)

Jan 7 - Muscat
Kuwait 1 (Neda 28)
Bahrain 0
HT: 1-0

Jan 7 - Muscat
Oman 4 (Rabia 24, 65, 80, Al-Hawsani 51)
Iraq 0
HT: 1-0

Jan 10 - Wattayah
Kuwait 1 (Mattar 37)
Iraq 1 (Abdullah 66)
HT: 1-0

Jan 10 - Muscat
Oman 2 (Al-Maymani 14, Basheer 72)
Bahrain 0
HT: 1-0

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Oman	3	2	1	0	6	0	7
Kuwait	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Bahrain	3	1	0	2	3	4	3
Iraq	3	0	1	2	2	8	1

Group B

Jan 5 - Wattayah
United Arab Emirates 3 (Omar 6, Al-Hamadi 14, Al-Shehhi 66)
Yemen 1 (Al-Nono 90)
HT: 2-0

Jan 5 - Wattayah
Saudi Arabia 0
Qatar 0

Jan 8 - Wattayah
Qatar 0
United Arab Emirates 0

Jan 8 - Wattayah
Saudi Arabia 6 (Y Al-Qahtani 4, Moad 11, 83, Al-Sheal 18, Otaif 19, Al-Mousa 36)
Yemen 0
HT: 5-0
Sent off: Al-Amqi (Yemen) 70min

Jan 11 - Muscat
United Arab Emirates 0
Saudi Arabia 3 (Y Al-Qahtani 58, Al-Zori 70, Al-Fraidi 73)
HT: 0-0

Jan 11 - Wattayah
Qatar 2 (Haroun 13, Siddiq 90)
Yemen 1 (Al-Nono pen 30)
HT: 1-1
Sent off: Saleh 90min, Farid 90min (both Yemen)

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saudi Arabia	3	2	1	0	9	0	7
Qatar	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
UAE	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Yemen	3	0	0	3	2	11	0

Semi-finals

Jan 14 - Muscat
Oman 1 (Rabia 19)
Qatar 0
HT: 1-0

Jan 14 - Muscat
Saudi Arabia 1 (Al-Fraidi 63)
Kuwait 0
HT: 0-0

Final

Jan 17 - Muscat
Oman 0
Saudi Arabia 0
Aet
Oman 6-5 on pens

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

Group A

Jan 20 - Kumamoto
Japan 2 (Okazaki 7, Tatsuya Tanaka 65)
Yemen 1 (Farid 47)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,654. **Ref:** Tan (Chn)
Japan: Kawashima - Komano, Terada, Takagi, Uchida, Aoki, K Nakamura, Kagawa (Kanazaki 88), Tatsuya Tanaka (Inui 79), Okazaki, Koroki (Maki 60).

Jan 21 - Hong Kong
Hong Kong 1 (Cheng Siu-wai 90)
Bahrain 3 (Abdullatef 10, Baba 37, Isa 87)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 6,013. **Ref:** Vo (Vie)

Jan 28 - Manama
Bahrain 1 (Isa 24)
Japan 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 11,200. **Ref:** Irmatov (Uzb)
Japan: Kawashima - Uchida, Terada, Nakazawa, Nagamoto, K Nakamura, Inamoto, Okazaki (Koroki 76), Honda (Kagawa 63), Tatsuya Tanaka (Maki 82), Tamada.

Jan 28 - Sana'a
Yemen 1 (Al-Selwi 52)
Hong Kong 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Al-Hilali (Oma)

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bahrain	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Japan	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Yemen	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
Hong Kong	2	0	0	2	1	4	0

20.01.09 Japan-Yemen 2-1
21.01.09 Hong Kong-Bahrain 1-3
28.01.09 Bahrain-Japan 1-0
28.01.09 Yemen-Hong Kong 1-0
14.11.09 Japan-Hong Kong
14.11.09 Yemen-Bahrain
18.11.09 Bahrain-Yemen
18.11.09 Hong Kong-Japan
06.01.10 Bahrain-Hong Kong
06.01.10 Yemen-Japan
03.03.10 Hong Kong-Yemen
03.03.10 Japan-Bahrain

Group B

Jan 19 - Muscat
Oman 0
Indonesia 0
Att: 13,000. **Ref:** Shamsuzzaman (Ban)

Jan 28 - Jakarta
Indonesia 0
Australia 0
Att: 50,000. **Ref:** Abdul Bashir (Sin)
Australia: Galekovic - Moore, Vargas, Heffernan (Zullo 74), Jamieson, McKay, Reid, Pondeljak (Celeski 68), M Thompson, Allsopp (Simon 57), A Thompson.

Jan 28 - Kuwait City
Kuwait 0
Oman 1 (Rabia 63)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 22,000. **Ref:** Al-Saeedi (UAE)

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Oman	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Indonesia	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Australia	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Kuwait	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

19.01.09 Oman-Indonesia 0-0
28.01.09 Indonesia-Australia 0-0
28.01.09 Kuwait-Oman 0-1
05.03.09 Australia-Kuwait
14.11.09 Australia-Oman
14.11.09 Kuwait-Indonesia
18.11.09 Indonesia-Kuwait
18.11.09 Oman-Australia
06.01.10 Indonesia-Oman
06.01.10 Kuwait-Australia
03.03.10 Australia-Indonesia
03.03.10 Oman-Kuwait

Group C

Jan 21 - Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia 0
United Arab Emirates 5 (Omar 29, pen 45, Matar 62, 75, Khalil 85)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Williams (Aus)

Jan 28 - Sharjah
United Arab Emirates 0
Uzbekistan 1 (Tadjiyev 30)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Nishimura (Jap)

GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
UAE	2	1	0	1	5	1	3
Uzbekistan	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Malaysia	1	0	0	1	0	5	0

21.01.09 Malaysia-UAE 0-5
28.01.09 UAE-Uzbekistan 0-1
14.11.09 Uzbekistan-Malaysia
18.11.09 Malaysia-Uzbekistan
06.01.10 UAE-Malaysia
03.03.10 Uzbekistan-UAE

Group D

Jan 14 - Aleppo
Syria 3 (Al-Sayed pen 6, 24, Al-Khatib pen 39)
China 2 (Qu Bo 51, Liu Jian 90)
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 7,000. **Ref:** Torky (Irn)

Jan 14 - Hanoi
Vietnam 3 (Nguyen Minh Phuong 11, Le Cong Vinh 30, Nguyen Vu Phong 69)
Lebanon 1 (Moghrabi 74)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 13,000. **Ref:** Iemoto (Jap)
Sent off: Le Cong Vinh (Vietnam) 59min

Jan 21 - Hangzhou
China 6 (Gao Lin 1, 20, 83, Du Wei 27, Jiang Ning 37, Hao Junmin 47)
Vietnam 1 (Nguyen Vu Phong 9)
HT: 4-1. **Att:** 15,300. **Ref:** Kim (SKo)

Jan 28 - Saida
Lebanon 0
Syria 2 (Al-Hussain 37, Al-Khatib 77)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 300. **Ref:** Balideh (Qat)

GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Syria	2	2	0	0	5	2	6
China	2	1	0	1	8	4	3
Vietnam	2	1	0	1	4	7	3
Lebanon	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

14.01.09	Syria-China 3-2
14.01.09	Vietnam-Lebanon 3-1
21.01.09	China-Vietnam 6-1
28.01.09	Lebanon-Syria 0-2
14.11.09	Lebanon-China
14.11.09	Vietnam-Syria
18.11.09	Syria-Vietnam
22.11.09	China-Lebanon
06.01.10	China-Syria
06.01.10	Lebanon-Vietnam
17.01.10	Vietnam-China
03.03.10	Syria-Lebanon

Group E

Jan 14 - Tehran
Iran 6 (Gholamnejad 43, Bagheri 52, Rezaei 55, M Zare 79, Nouri 82, 83)
Singapore 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Mansour (Leb)
Sent off: Yunos (Singapore) 40min
Iran: Mehdi Rahmati - Kaebi (Seyed Salehi 80), Hosseini, Aghily, Ashjari, Gholamnejad (S Zare 68), Khalatbary, Bagheri (Nouri 68), M Zare, Rezaei, Borhani.

Jan 14 - Amman
Jordan 0
Thailand 0
Att: 5,000. **Ref:** Racho (Syr)

Jan 28 - Singapore
Singapore 2 (Casmir 21, Noh Alam Shah 63)
Jordan 1 (Aqel pen 41)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 6,188. **Ref:** Green (Aus)

Jan 28 - Bangkok
Thailand 0
Iran 0
Att: 13,000. **Ref:** Kovalenko (Uzb)
Iran: Mehdi Rahmati - Kaebi, Hosseini, Aghily, Ashjari, Gholamnejad, Khalatbary, Bagheri (Seyed Salehi 71), M Zare (K Rahmati 57), Rezaei (Nouri 71), Borhani.

GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran	2	1	1	0	6	0	4
Singapore	2	1	0	1	2	7	3
Thailand	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
Jordan	2	0	1	1	1	2	1

14.01.09	Iran-Singapore 6-0
14.01.09	Jordan-Thailand 0-0
28.01.09	Singapore-Jordan 2-1
28.01.09	Thailand-Iran 0-0
14.11.09	Iran-Jordan
14.11.09	Singapore-Thailand
18.11.09	Jordan-Iran
18.11.09	Thailand-Singapore
06.01.10	Singapore-Iran
06.01.10	Thailand-Jordan
03.03.10	Iran-Thailand
03.03.10	Jordan-Singapore

Top two in each group qualify for the 16-team Asian Cup finals, to be played in 2011. Hosts Qatar qualify automatically, as do the best three sides from the 2007 Asian Cup finals – winners Iraq, runners-up Saudi Arabia and third-placed South Korea – and the winners of the AFC Challenge Cup in 2008 (India) and 2010

AFC CHALLENGE CUP QUALIFIERS

Preliminary round draw

Macau v Mongolia

1st leg - March 7; 2nd leg - March 14

Winners enter group stage

Group stage draw

Group A
Bangladesh
Cambodia
Myanmar
Macau OR Mongolia

Group B
Bhutan
Maldives
Philippines
Turkmenistan

Group C
Afghanistan
Kyrgyzstan
Nepal
Palestine

Group D
Brunei
Pakistan
Sri Lanka
Taiwan

Group winners and the best runner-up qualify for the eight-team AFC Challenge Cup finals, to be played in 2010. India (holders), North Korea and Tajikistan qualify for the finals automatically

CONCACAF GOLD CUP QUALIFIERS

CENTRAL AMERICA ZONE*

**Tournament doubled as the Central America regional championship, known as the UNCAF Cup*

In Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Group A

Jan 22
El Salvador 1 (Aviles og 18)
Nicaragua 1 (Medina 85)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Batres (Gtm)
Sent off: Martin (El Salvador) 25min

Jan 22
Honduras 2 (Guevara 32, W Martinez 61)
Belize 1 (Castillo 86)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Moreno (Pan)
Sent off: Guevara (Honduras) 90min

Jan 24
Belize 1 (James 73)
El Salvador 4 (Pacheco pen 11, pen 30, Sanchez 75, Ayala 88)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Quesada (CR)

Jan 24
Honduras 4 (Rodriguez 16, Solorzano og 65, S Martinez 73, W Martinez 79)
Nicaragua 1 (Reyes 30)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Batres (Gtm)

Jan 26
Nicaragua 1 (Barrera 66)
Belize 1 (Usher 27)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 8,000. **Ref:** Moncada (Hnd)

Jan 26
Honduras 2 (Pavon pen 34, M Chavez 73)
El Salvador 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 20,000

GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Honduras	3	3	0	0	8	2	9
El Salvador	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Nicaragua	3	0	2	1	3	6	2
Belize	3	0	1	2	3	7	1

Group B

Jan 23
Costa Rica 3 (Furtado 8, 15, Sanchez 55)
Panama 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 2,000. **Ref:** Campbell (Jam)
Sent off: Umana (Costa Rica) 90min

Jan 25
Guatemala 1 (Pappa 51)
Costa Rica 3 (Sanchez 34, Herrera 59, Segura 61)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Rodriguez (Mex)
Sent off: Gallardo 26min, Castillo 68min (both Guatemala)

Jan 27
Panama 1 (Zapata 21)
Guatemala 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Aguilar (ElS)
Sent off: Herrera (Panama) 39min

GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Costa Rica	2	2	0	0	6	1	6
Panama	2	1	0	1	1	3	3
Guatemala	2	0	0	2	1	4	0

Fifth-place play-off

Jan 29
Nicaragua 2 (Wilson 39, 85)
Guatemala 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 150. **Ref:** Moncada (Hnd)

Semi-finals

**Jan 30*
Costa Rica 1 (Furtado 18)
El Salvador 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 2,500. **Ref:** Moreno (Pan)
**Match abandoned in 60th minute. Result stood. (El Salvador had only six players left – the minimum number is seven – after having two players sent off, making three substitutions and then losing three players to injury.)*
Costa Rica: Navas - Fernandez, Umana, Oviedo, A Alpizar, Furtado, L Gonzalez, Davis (V Nunez 46), Herrera, Johnson, Sanchez.
El Salvador: Gomez - Escobar, Gonzalez, L Hernandez, Sanchez (Umanzor 16), Romero (Coreas 46), Rudis Corrales (Roberto Corrales 46), Pacheco, Quintanilla, Martin, Jimenez. *Sent off: Escobar 14min, Quintanilla 25min.*

Jan 30
Honduras 0
Panama 1 (Phillips 39)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Batres (Gtm)
Honduras: N Valladares - O Chavez, Norales, E Martinez, Turcios, S Martinez (Espinoza 81), M Chavez (Pavon 55), Garcia, Guevara (Mejia 85), Guerrero, Thomas.
Panama: Penedo - Rivera, Anthony, M Torres, A Henriquez, G Torres (Jimenez 64), Barahona (Jaramillo 73), Gun, Machado, Rodriguez, Phillips (Bonaga 40).

Third-place play-off

Feb 1
El Salvador 0
Honduras 1 (Espinoza 30)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 900. **Ref:** Quesada (CR)
El Salvador: Montes - Gonzalez, L Hernandez, Sanchez, Romero, Coreas, Ayala (Larios 63), Miranda (Martin 73), Alvarado (Pacheco 81), Castillo, Jimenez. *Sent off: Martin 90min.*
Honduras: Bodden - O Chavez, Beata, E Martinez (Guevara 70), Mejia (Garcia 90), Espinoza (Guerrero 72), Thomas, M Chavez, Rodriguez, Acevedo, E Izaguirre. *Sent off: Guevara 76min.*

Final

Feb 1
Costa Rica 0
Panama 0
Att: 900. **Ref:** Batres (Gtm)
Panama 5-3 on pens
Costa Rica: R Gonzalez - Fernandez, Umana, Oviedo, A Alpizar (Brenes 58), Furtado, Davis, Herrera (Jimenez 72), L Gonzalez, Johnson, Sanchez (Nunez 46).
Panama: Penedo - Rivera, Anthony, M Torres, A Henriquez, G Torres (Herrera 69), Rodriguez (Aguilar 62), Gun, Machado, Barahona (Jaramillo 81), Phillips.

Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua qualify for the 12-team CONCACAF Gold Cup finals – to be played in the United States from July 3 to 26, 2009 – along with Jamaica, Grenada, Guadeloupe and Cuba, who progressed from the Caribbean qualifying zone. Canada, Mexico and the United States qualified for the finals automatically

FRIENDLIES

Friday, January 9

Jan 9 - Tehran
Iran 3 (Borhani 19, Bagheri 26, M Zare pen 71)
China 1 (Huang Bowen 65)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Mozaffari (Irn)
Iran: Mehdi Rahmati - Kaebi (Hajsafy 60), Hosseini, Aghily, Ashjari (S Zare 60), Gholamnejad (Heydari 71), Khalatbary (Baeo 60), Bagheri (Nouri 38), M Zare, Rezaei, Borhani (Seyed Salehi 60).
China: Song Zhenyu - Du Wei, Yang Cao (Jao Z 66), Hao Junmen, Zhang Yaokun, Huang Bowen, Jian Ning (Shen Longyuan 56), Wang Dong, Gao Lin (T Zhu 71), Du Zhenyu (Hao J M 59), Qu Bo.

Wednesday, January 14

Jan 14 - Hong Kong
Hong Kong 2 (Au Yeung Yiu-chung 70, Ng Wai-chiu 90)
India 1 (Bhutia 80)
HT: 0-0

Saturday, January 17

Jan 17 - Fort Pierce, USA
Guatemala 1 (Enriquez 64)
Haiti 0
HT: 0-0

Sunday, January 18

Jan 18 - Fort Lauderdale, USA
Honduras 2 (Pavon 77, Guevara pen 85)
Chile 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 12,282. **Ref:** Moody (USA)
Honduras: N Valladares - Beata, Norales, Garcia, Guerrero (E Izaguirre 58), Rodriguez (Thomas 75), Guevara, E Martinez (Turcios 69), Mejia, S Martinez (Pavon 58), W Martinez.
Chile: Pinto - Martinez, Acevedo, Estrada (Jorquera 80), Figueroa (Fuenzalida 32), Iturra, Cereceda, Millar, Orellana, Gazale (Meneses 64), Hernandez. *Sent off: Fuenzalida 34min.*

Jan 18 - Kuwait City
Syria 5 (Dyab 42, Rafe 53, Bakri 67, Al-Khatib 70, 83)
Turkmenistan 1 (Bablin 12)
HT: 1-1

Tuesday, January 20

Jan 20 - Kuwait City
Kuwait 2 (Al-Enezi 77, Khalaf 86)
Turkmenistan 0
HT: 0-0

Wednesday, January 21

*Jan 21 - Phuket**
Thailand 2 (Teerasil 12, Suchao 22)
Lebanon 1 (El-Ali 50)
HT: 2-0
**Part of King's Cup, which also featured a non-A selection*

Friday, January 23

Jan 23 - Cairo
Egypt 1 (A Hassan 26)
Kenya 0
HT: 1-0
Egypt: Abdel W El-Sayed (Abdel Hamid) - El-Mohammady (Tawfik), Fathi (Shaaban), H Said (Fathallah), Gomaa (Ahmed El-Sayed), Farag (Mohamed), Khairy (El-Herda), A Hassan (A El-Said), Shikabala (Soliman), Abdel Malek (Maguid), Abdel Ghani (Abdel Raouf).

Jan 23 - Kuwait City
Kuwait 2 (Neda 17, Al-Mutawa 55)
Syria 3 (Rafe pen 29, Ismael 52, Al-Khatib pen 65)
HT: 1-1
Sent off: Fadel (Kuwait) 90min; Al-Azhar (Syria) 90min

*Jan 23 - Phuket, Thailand**
North Korea 0
Lebanon 1 (Atwi pen 2)
HT: 0-1
**Part of King's Cup*

Saturday, January 24
Jan 24 - Carson
United States 3 (Kljestan 17, pen 40, 74)
Sweden 2 (Nannskog 73, Dahlberg 89)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 9,918. **Ref:** Petrescu (Can)
United States: Perkins - Wynne, Califf, Parkhurst (Ihemelu 82), Bornstein (Wingert 79), Thorrington (Rolfe 61), Clark, Kljestan, Rogers (Carroll 69), Davies (Cooper 46), Ching (Gaven 77).
Sweden: Dahlin - M Jonsson, Lindberg, Von Schlebrugge, Adam Johansson, Dahl (R Elm 62), D Andersson (Ericsson 71), G Svensson, Holmen (A Farnerud 62), Dahlberg, Nannskog.

Tuesday, January 27
Jan 27 - Atteridgeville
South Africa 1 (Modise 54)
Zambia 0
HT: 0-0
South Africa: Khune - Gaxa, Khumalo, Gould, Thwala, Modise, Tsutsulupa, Dikgacoi, Tshabalala (Mothibantwa 90), Moriri (Mashego 70), Khenyeza (Nale 85).
Zambia: Mweene (Kaumbua 49) - Nkausu (Hachilensa 48), Musonda (D Banda 90), Chintu, Tana, Hachipuka, Mudenda (S Banda 57), Chivuta (Pondani 71), H Banda (Bwalya 57), Mbesuma, Sakala (Mbewe 65).

Wednesday, January 28
Jan 28 - Oakland, USA
Mexico 0
Sweden 1 (A Farnerud 57)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 46,550. **Ref:** Ward (USA)
Mexico: O Sanchez (G Ochoa 46) - D Martinez (Valenzuela 46), Lopez, Duenas (Dominguez 53), Pinto, Ayala (Naelson 59), Pardo, Leandro Augusto, A Medina, Vuoso (C Ochoa 46), I Martinez (Villaluz 71).
Sweden: Alvbage - Anttonen, Bjarsmyr, Bengtsson, Adam Johansson, D Andersson (Holmen 46), A Farnerud (Landgren 75), Andreas Johansson, R Elm (Dahl 90), Nannskog (Avdic 66), Ericsson (G Svensson 86).

Sunday, February 1
Feb 1 - Dubai
Syria 1 (Al-Rashed 90)
South Korea 1 (Etouni og 80)
HT: 0-0
South Korea: Lee Woon-jae - Cho Yong-hyung, Kang Min-soo, Lee Jung-soo (Kim Dong-jin 46), Choi Hyo-jin (Kim Chang-soo 46), Kim Chi-woo, Kim Jung-woo (Han Tae-you 60), Ki Sung-yueng (Ha Dae-sung 18), Yeom Ki-hun, Lee Keun-ho (Kim Chi-gon 75), Jeong Sung-hoon (Jung Jo-gook 46).

Feb 1 - Dubai
Uzbekistan 1 (Kurbanov 80)
Azerbaijan 1 (Ranim pen 63)
HT: 0-0

Wednesday, February 4
Feb 4 - Dubai
Bahrain 2 (Aaish pen 63, Abdulrahim 82)
South Korea 2 (Kim Jung-woo 79, Lee Keun-ho 90)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 370. **Ref:** Mohammed (UAE)
South Korea: Lee Woon-jae - Cho Yong-hyung (Choi Hyo-jin 79), Kim Chang-soo (Kang Min-soo 79), Lee Jung-soo, Kim Dong-jin, Kim Chi-woo, Kim Jung-woo, Yeom Ki-hun, Lee Chung-yong (Han Tae-you 68), Lee Keun-ho, Jung Jo-gook (Jeong Sung-hoon 46).

Feb 4 - Tokyo
Japan 5 (Okazaki 15, 32, Kagawa 44, Nakazawa 57, Yasuda 86)
Finland 1 (Porokara 50)
HT: 3-0. **Att:** 34,532. **Ref:** Huang (Chn)
Japan: Tsuzuki - Nakazawa, Tulio Tanaka (Takagi 55), Nagamoto, Uchida (Komano 72), Hashimoto, Endo (Konno 77), K Nakamura, Kagawa (Yasuda 81), Tamada (Maki 84), Okazaki.
Finland: Maanoja - Halsti, Kuivasto, Aho, Turunen (Raitala 55), Sparv, Porokara, Arkivuo (P Hetemaj 85), Kujala (M Hetemaj 46), Litmanen (Pukki 68), Tarvajarvi (Parikka 77).

Thursday, February 5
Feb 5 - Sendai, Japan
Thailand 1 (Teerasil 89)
Saudi Arabia 2 (Belal 61, Al-Namri 64)
HT: 0-0

CLUB FOOTBALL EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

GROUP A – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Roma	6	4	0	2	12	6	12
Chelsea	6	3	2	1	9	5	11
Bordeaux	6	2	1	3	5	11	7
CFR	6	1	1	4	5	9	4

Group B

GROUP B – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Panathinaikos	6	3	1	2	8	7	10
Inter	6	2	2	2	8	7	8
Werder	6	1	4	1	7	9	7
Anorthosis	6	1	3	2	8	8	6

Group C

GROUP C – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	6	4	1	1	18	8	13
Sporting	6	4	0	2	8	8	12
Shakhtar	6	3	0	3	11	7	9
Basle	6	0	1	5	2	16	1

Group D

GROUP D – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Liverpool	6	4	2	0	11	5	14
Atletico	6	3	3	0	9	4	12
Marseille	6	1	1	4	5	7	4
PSV	6	1	0	5	5	14	3

Group E

GROUP E – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man Utd	6	2	4	0	9	3	10
Villarreal	6	2	3	1	9	7	9
AaB	6	1	3	2	9	14	6
Celtic	6	1	2	3	4	7	5

Group F

GROUP F – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern	6	4	2	0	12	4	14
Lyon	6	3	2	1	14	10	11
Fiorentina	6	1	3	2	5	8	6
Steaua	6	0	1	5	3	12	1

Group G

GROUP G – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto	6	4	0	2	9	8	12
Arsenal	6	3	2	1	11	5	11
Dynamo	6	2	2	2	4	4	8
Fenerbahce	6	0	2	4	4	11	2

Group H

GROUP H – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Juventus	6	3	3	0	7	3	12
Real Madrid	6	4	0	2	9	5	12
Zenit	6	1	2	3	4	7	5
BATE	6	0	3	3	3	8	3

Top two in each group qualified for 1st knockout round; third-placed teams entered UEFA Cup 1st knockout round

1st knockout round draw

Arsenal (Eng) v Roma (Ita)*
Atletico Madrid (Spa) v Porto (Por)*
Chelsea (Eng) v Juventus (Ita)**
Internazionale (Ita) v Manchester United (Eng)*
Lyon (Fra) v Barcelona (Spa)*
Real Madrid (Spa) v Liverpool (Eng)**
Sporting Lisbon (Por) v Bayern Munich (Ger)**
Villarreal (Spa) v Panathinaikos (Gre)**

**1st legs - February 24; 2nd legs - March 11*
***1st legs - February 25; 2nd legs - March 10*

UEFA CUP

Group A

GROUP A – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man City	4	2	1	1	6	5	7
Twente	4	2	0	2	5	8	6
PSG	4	1	2	1	7	5	5
R Santander	4	1	2	1	6	5	5
Schalke	4	1	1	2	5	6	4

Group B

GROUP B – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Metalist	4	3	1	0	3	0	10
Galatasaray	4	3	0	1	4	1	9
Olympiakos	4	2	0	2	9	3	6
Hertha Berlin	4	0	2	2	1	6	2
Benfica	4	0	1	3	2	9	1

Group C

GROUP C – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Standard Liege	4	3	0	1	5	3	9
Stuttgart	4	2	1	1	6	3	7
Sampdoria	4	2	1	1	4	5	7
Sevilla	4	2	0	2	5	2	6
Partizan B	4	0	0	4	1	8	0

Group D

GROUP D – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Udinese	4	3	0	1	6	4	9
Tottenham	4	2	1	1	7	4	7
NEC Nijmegen	4	2	0	2	6	5	6
Spartak M'cow	4	1	1	2	5	6	4
Dinamo Z	4	1	0	3	4	9	3

Group E

GROUP E – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wolfsburg	4	3	1	0	13	7	10
Milan	4	2	2	0	8	5	8
Braga	4	2	0	2	7	5	6
Portsmouth	4	1	1	2	7	8	4
Heerenveen	4	0	0	4	3	13	0

Group F

GROUP F – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hamburg	4	3	0	1	7	3	9
Ajax	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Aston Villa	4	2	0	2	5	6	6
Zilina	4	1	1	2	3	4	4
Slavia Prague	4	0	2	2	2	5	2

Group G

GROUP G – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saint-Etienne	4	2	2	0	9	4	8
Valencia	4	1	3	0	8	4	6
Copenhagen	4	1	2	1	4	5	5
Club Brugge	4	0	3	1	2	3	3
Rosenborg	4	0	2	2	1	8	2

Group H

GROUP H – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CSKA Moscow	4	4	0	0	12	5	12
Dep Coruna	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Lech Poznan	4	1	2	1	5	5	5
Nancy	4	1	1	2	8	7	4
Feyenoord	4	0	0	4	1	10	0

Top three in each group qualified for 1st knockout round, in which they are joined by the third-placed sides from the eight Champions League groups

1st knockout round draw

AaB Aalborg (Den) v Deportivo La Coruna (Spa)
Aston Villa (Eng) v CSKA Moscow (Rus)
Bordeaux (Fra) v Galatasaray (Tur)
FC Copenhagen (Den) v Manchester City (Eng)
Dynamo Kyiv (Ukr) v Valencia (Spa)
Fiorentina (Ita) v Ajax (Hol)
Lech Poznan (Pol) v Udinese (Ita)
Marseille (Fra) v Twente Enschede (Hol)
NEC Nijmegen (Hol) v Hamburg (Ger)
Olympiakos (Gre) v Saint-Etienne (Fra)
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra) v Wolfsburg (Ger)
Sampdoria (Ita) v Metalist (Ukr)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) v Tottenham (Eng)
Sporting Braga (Por) v Standard Liege (Blg)
Werder Bremen (Ger) v Milan (Ita)
Zenit St Petersburg (Rus) v Stuttgart (Ger)

1st legs - February 18/19; 2nd legs - February 26

AUSTRIA

AUSTRIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Salzburg	21	14	4	3	57	29	46
Rapid	22	12	6	4	55	26	42
Sturm	21	13	3	5	49	24	42
Austria Wien	22	12	6	4	35	26	42
A Karnten	20	9	5	6	32	22	32
Ried	22	9	5	8	30	26	32
LASK	22	8	1	13	22	41	25
Kapfenberg	22	5	3	14	26	49	18
Mattersburg	22	3	4	15	23	49	13
Altach	22	4	1	17	29	66	13

BELGIUM

Friday, January 16
Anderlecht 1 (Gillet 23)
Cercle Brugge 2 (Iachtchouk 2, 64) Att: 23,296

Saturday, January 17
Club Brugge 3 (Vargas 34, Alcaraz 64, Simaeys 89)
Mechelen 0 Att: 26,248

Kortrijk 2 (Belhocine 15, Kums pen 45)
Roeselare 1 (MacDonald 56) Att: 6,219

Lokeren 2 (Maazou 12, 78)
Zulte Waregem 1 (Leye 66) Att: 5,081

Mons 1 (Brahami pen 8)
Gent 2 (Ruiz Gonzales 41, Suler 86) Att: 3,524

Mouscron 1 (Berton 65)
Tubize 1 (Barisic 20) Att: 4,157

Standard 3 (Jovanovic 3, Mbokani 29, Defour 58)
Dender 2 (Onyewu og 6, De Pever 30) Att: 26,000

Sunday, January 18
Charleroi 1 (Iajour pen 58)
Westerlo 2 (Adams 35, Ruiz 77) Att: 7,012

Germinal Beerschot 4 (De Wree 38, 75, Haroun pen 64, King 83)
Genk 1 (Vossen 78) Att: 9,561

Saturday, January 24
Cercle Brugge 0
Kortrijk 1 (Coulibaly 34) Att: 8,000

Dender 0
Germinal Beerschot 1 (Haroun 79) Att: 4,984

Genk 2 (Toth 2, Pudil 52)
Mons 0 Att: 20,414

Mechelen 2 (Persoons 13, Vleminckx 77)
Mouscron 2 (Lepoint 34, Van Hoevelen og 45) Att: 10,000

Roeselare 3 (MacDonald 4, Perisic 45, Dissa 60)
Charleroi 1 (Iajour 8) Att: 4,676

Tubize 2 (Villano 67, Dufer 87)
Lokeren 1 (Maazou 42) Att: 3,500

Sunday, January 25
Westerlo 0
Standard 1 (De Camargo 84) Att: 7,982

Zulte Waregem 3 (Berrier 4, Leye 61, Nfor 81)
Club Brugge 1 (Alcaraz 76) Att: 7,000

Saturday, January 31
Club Brugge 3 (Chavez 44, Dirar 71, Daerden 79)
Tubize 1 (Sorokin 89)

Germinal Beerschot 2 (Malki 47, Dosunmu 63)
Westerlo 1 (Zeienka 52)

Kortrijk 1 (Kums 11)
Anderlecht 3 (Vlcek 51, Juhasz 62, Boussoufa 90)

Mons 1 (Oris 54)
Cercle Brugge 1 (Iachtchouk 13)

Mouscron 0
Dender 2 (Destorme 61, Aganovic 66)

Standard 3 (Jovanovic pen 26, Witsel 40, Benko 90)
Roeselare 0

Zulte Waregem 1 (Leye 67)
Mechelen 1 (Van Dessel 61)

Sunday, February 1
Charleroi 2 (Mujangi Bia pen 33, Thereau 89)
Gent 5 (Maric 13, Wils 22, Ljubijankic 60, Custovic 65, Smolders 88)

Lokeren 1 (Golan 19)
Genk 2 (De Mul 67, Nemec 89)

BELGIUM	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Standard	20	13	4	3	37	19	43
Anderlecht	19	13	2	4	47	20	41
Club Brugge	20	11	4	5	36	27	37
Genk	20	11	3	6	31	27	36
Cercle Brugge	20	10	2	8	32	31	32
Westerlo	20	9	4	7	25	24	31
Lokeren	20	7	9	4	26	19	30
Gent	19	8	5	6	40	27	29
Mouscron	20	8	5	7	31	27	29
Z Waregem	20	8	4	8	30	27	28
Kortrijk	20	7	7	6	22	28	28
Germinal B	20	6	6	8	25	25	24
Charleroi	20	6	3	11	26	36	21
Mechelen	20	4	8	8	22	34	20
Dender	20	4	6	10	25	37	18
Tubize	20	5	3	12	24	41	18
Mons	20	3	7	10	21	29	16
Roeselare	20	3	4	13	17	39	13

LEADING GOALSCORERS
14 Moussa Maazou (Lokeren)
12 Dieumerci Mbokani (Standard)
10 Adnan Custovic (Mouscron)
10 Oleg Iachtchouk (Cercle Brugge)
10 Jeremy Perbet (Tubize)

BELGIAN CUP – quarter-finals

1st legs - January 27/28; 2nd legs - February 4/17
Cercle Brugge v Roeselare
1-0
Gent v Genk
1-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 1-2)
Mechelen v Kortrijk
1-0
Racing Mechelen v Lierse
1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3)

BULGARIA

BULGARIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Levski	15	10	3	2	26	7	33
CSKA	15	9	5	1	26	12	32
Lovech	15	8	4	3	22	13	28
Cherno More	15	8	2	5	24	12	26
Sliven	15	6	6	3	20	15	24
Lok Sofia	15	6	4	5	13	13	22
Lok Mezdra	15	6	3	6	20	16	21
Slavia	15	6	2	7	18	17	20
Chernomorets	15	4	7	4	18	19	19
Pirin	15	5	3	7	15	21	18
Minyor	15	4	5	6	11	18	17
Vihren	15	5	1	9	11	18	16
Lok Plovdiv	15	3	6	6	17	24	15
Botev	15	3	6	6	14	21	15
Spartak Varna	15	2	5	8	10	23	11
Belasitsa	15	2	4	9	9	25	10

CROATIA

CROATIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	18	12	3	3	38	17	39
Hajduk	18	12	2	4	31	17	38
Sibenik	18	8	4	6	27	16	28
Slaven	18	8	4	6	25	22	28
Rijeka	18	7	4	7	21	20	25
Varteks	18	7	3	8	25	27	24
Zagreb	18	6	6	6	19	25	24
Osijek	18	6	5	7	25	24	23
Cibalia	18	6	3	9	17	31	21
Sesvete	18	5	4	9	22	32	19
Inter	18	4	6	8	29	33	18
Zadar	18	3	4	11	13	28	13

CZECH REPUBLIC

CZECH REPUBLIC	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slavia	16	11	4	1	37	11	37
M Boleslav	16	9	4	3	23	16	31
Ostrava	16	9	3	4	30	16	30
Sparta	16	8	3	5	27	17	27
Liberec	16	7	5	4	21	17	26
Olomouc	16	7	5	4	21	21	26
Pizen	16	5	7	4	23	19	22
Teplice	16	6	4	6	17	14	22
Jablonec	16	6	4	6	16	20	22
Brno	16	5	5	6	17	16	20
Bohemians	16	6	1	9	23	29	19
Pribram	16	5	3	8	17	21	18
C Budejovice	16	3	9	4	14	22	18
Kladno	16	3	4	9	9	27	13
Zizkov	16	3	2	11	16	26	11
Zlin	16	2	3	11	8	27	9

DENMARK

DENMARK	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brondby	17	12	3	2	30	13	39
Copenhagen	17	11	4	2	32	12	37
OB	17	11	2	4	32	18	35
Midtjylland	17	9	4	4	26	19	31
AGF	17	7	3	7	20	22	24
AaB	17	6	5	6	23	25	23
Randers	17	4	9	4	27	22	21
Nordsjaelland	17	4	4	9	19	27	16
SonderjyskE	17	3	6	8	14	29	15
Esbjerg	17	2	7	8	15	23	13
Vejle	17	2	6	9	12	27	12
Horsens	17	2	5	10	17	30	11

ENGLAND

Saturday, January 10
Arsenal 1 (Bendtner 84)
Bolton 0 Att: 60,068

Aston Villa 2 (Davies 19, Carson og 41)
West Bromwich 1 (Morrison 49) Att: 41,757

Everton 2 (Fellaini 18, Arteta 45)
Hull 0 Att: 37,527

Middlesbrough 1 (Afonso Alves 45)
Sunderland 1 (Jones 82) Att: 29,310

Newcastle 2 (Owen 19, Carroll 78)
West Ham 2 (Bellamy 29, Cole 55) Att: 47,571

Stoke 0
Liverpool 0 Att: 27,500

Sunday, January 11
Manchester United 3 (Vidic 45, Rooney 63, Berbatov 87)
Chelsea 0 Att: 75,455

Wigan 1 (Figueroa 90)
Tottenham 0 Att: 17,500

Wednesday, January 14
Manchester United 1 (Rooney 1)
Wigan 0 Att: 73,917

Saturday, January 17
Blackburn 3 (McCarthy pen 61, Roberts 66, 86)
Newcastle 0 Att: 25,583

Bolton 0
Manchester United 1 (Berbatov 90) Att: 26,021

Chelsea 2 (Belletti 88, Lampard 90)
Stoke 1 (Delap 60) Att: 41,788

Hull 1 (Cousin 65)
Arsenal 3 (Adebayor 30, Nasri 82, Bendtner 86) Att: 24,924

Manchester City 1 (Zabaleta 53)
Wigan 0 Att: 41,262

Sunderland 1 (Collins 11)
Aston Villa 2 (Milner 60, Barry pen 80) Att: 40,350

West Bromwich 3 (Brunt 4, Fortune 54, Koren 67)
Middlesbrough 0 Att: 25,557

Sunday, January 18
Tottenham 1 (Defoe 70)
Portsmouth 1 (Nugent 59) Att: 36,011

West Ham 3 (Di Michele 7, Noble pen 60, Cole 76)
Fulham 1 (Konchesky 22) Att: 31,818

Monday, January 19
Liverpool 1 (Gerrard 68)
Everton 1 (Cahill 87) Att: 44,382

Tuesday, January 27
Portsmouth 0
Aston Villa 1 (Heskey 21) Att: 19,073

Sunderland 1 (Jones 55)
Fulham 0 Att: 36,539

Tottenham 3 (Lennon 8, Defoe 21, Dawson 25)
Stoke 1 (Beattie 57) Att: 36,072

West Bromwich 0
Manchester United 5 (Berbatov 22, Tevez 44, Vidic 60, Cristiano Ronaldo 65, 73) Att: 26,105

Wednesday, January 28
Blackburn 2 (Warnock 66, McCarthy 87)
Bolton 2 (Taylor 15, K Davies 35) Att: 25,205

Chelsea 2 (Kalou 58, 81)
Middlesbrough 0 Att: 40,280

Everton 1 (Cahill 61)
Arsenal 1 (Van Persie 90) Att: 37,097

Manchester City 2 (Wright-Phillips 17, Bellamy 77)
Newcastle 1 (Carroll 81) Att: 42,280

West Ham 2 (Di Michele 33, Cole 51)
Hull 0 Att: 34,340

Wigan 1 (Hossam pen 83)
Liverpool 1 (Benayoun 41) Att: 21,237

Saturday, January 31
Arsenal 0
West Ham 0 Att: 60,109

Aston Villa 0
Wigan 0 Att: 41,766

Bolton 3 (Puygrenier 31, K Davies 64, 87)
Tottenham 2 (Bent 73, 75) Att: 21,575

Fulham 3 (Johnson 14, Nevland 71, 80)
Portsmouth 1 (Nugent 84) Att: 23,722

Hull 2 (Mendy 44, Fagan 69)
West Bromwich 2 (Simpson 53, Brunt pen 73) Att: 24,879

Manchester United 1 (Cristiano Ronaldo pen 44)
Everton 0 Att: 75,399

Middlesbrough 0
Blackburn 0 Att: 24,303

Stoke 1 (Beattie 45)
Manchester City 0 Att: 27,236

Sunday, February 1
Liverpool 2 (Fernando Torres 89, 90)
Chelsea 0 Att: 44,174

Newcastle 1 (Ameobi pen 68)
Sunderland 1 (Cisse 32) Att: 52,084

ENGLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Man Utd	23	16	5	2	40	10	53
Liverpool	24	14	9	1	39	15	51
Chelsea	24	14	6	4	44	15	48
Aston Villa	24	14	6	4	38	24	48
Arsenal	24	12	7	5	38	25	43
Everton	24	10	7	7	31	28	37
Wigan	24	9	6	9	26	24	33
West Ham	24	9	6	9	31	31	33
Fulham	22	7	8	7	22	19	29
Man City	23	8	4	11	41	32	28
Hull	24	7	7	10	31	46	28
Bolton	24	8	3	13	27	34	27
Sunderland	24	7	6	11	25	33	27
Tottenham	24	6	6	12	26	31	24
Newcastle	24	5	9	10	30	40	24
Portsmouth	23	6	6	11	23	38	24
Stoke	24	6	6	12	21	38	24
Blackburn	23	5	8	10	27	38	23
Middlesbrough	24	5	7	12	18	35	22
West Brom	24	6	4	14	22	44	22

LEADING GOALSCORERS
14 Nicolas Anelka (Chelsea)
11 Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester United)
11 Robinho (Manchester City)
10 Amr Zaki (Wigan)

FA CUP – last 64

Jan 13: Birmingham 0 Wolverhampton 2; Cheltenham 0 Doncaster 0; Histon 1 Swansea 2; Leyton Orient 1 Sheffield United 4.

Replays
Jan 13: Bristol City 0 Portsmouth 2; Burnley 2 Queens Park Rangers 1 (aet); Crewe 2 Millwall 3; Norwich 0 Charlton 1; Peterborough 0 West Bromwich 2.
Jan 14: Crystal Palace 2 Leicester 1; Newcastle 0 Hull 1; Southend 1 Chelsea 4.
Jan 20: Doncaster 3 Cheltenham 0.

Last 32

Jan 23: Derby 1 Nottingham Forest 1.
Jan 24: Chelsea 3 Ipswich 1; Doncaster 0 Aston Villa 0; Hartlepool 0 West Ham 2; Hull 2 Millwall 0; Kettering 2 Fulham 4; Manchester United 2 Tottenham 1; Portsmouth 0 Swansea 2; Sheffield United 2 Charlton 1; Sunderland 0 Blackburn 0; Torquay 0 Coventry 1; Watford 4 Crystal Palace 3; West Bromwich 2 Burnley 2; Wolverhampton 1 Middlesbrough 2.
Jan 25: Cardiff 0 Arsenal 0; Liverpool 1 Everton 1.

Replays
Feb 3: Burnley 3 West Bromwich 1.
Feb 4: Aston Villa 3 Doncaster 1; Blackburn 2 Sunderland 1 (aet); Everton 1 Liverpool 0 (aet); Nottingham Forest 2 Derby 3.
Still to play: Arsenal v Cardiff (Feb 16)

FRANCE

Saturday, January 10
Auxerre 0
Marseille 2 (Samassa 41, Valbuena 81) Att: 19,269

Le Havre 0
Toulouse 1 (Didot 79) Att: 12,413

Lyon 1 (Ederson 9)
Lorient 1 (Abriel 42) Att: 34,809

Monaco 1 (Licata 86)
Nantes 2 (Bagayoko 5, Capoue 41) Att: 6,415

Rennes 1 (Sow 46)
Grenoble 0 Att: 19,506

Sochaux 1 (Perquis 66)
Saint-Etienne 0 Att: 12,075

Sunday, January 11
Bordeaux 4 (Diawara 10, Cavenaghi 35, Gourcuff 70, Fernando 87)
Paris Saint-Germain 0 Att: 31,910

Saturday, January 17
Grenoble 0
Lyon 2 (Ederson 15, Delgado 77) Att: 19,264

Lorient 1 (Ciani 42)
Valenciennes 1 (Darcheville 26) Att: 11,816

Marseille 2 (Valbuena 25, Zubar 60)
Le Havre 0 Att: 45,721

Nantes 1 (Djordjevic 89)
Bordeaux 2 (Gourcuff 11, Chamakh 70) Att: 26,008

Nice 2 (Remy 50, Bamogo 90)
Auxerre 0 Att: 8,655

Saint-Etienne 1 (Gomis 55)
Le Mans 1 (Helstad 87) Att: 26,484

Toulouse 3 (Andre Luiz og 45, Gignac 81, Paulo Cesar 88)
Nancy 0 Att: 13,867

Sunday, January 18
Caen 2 (Savidan 72, Nivet 90)
Monaco 2 (Pino 6, Alonso 24) Att: 18,304

Lille 1 (Fauvergue 75)
Rennes 0 Att: 13,026

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Hoarau pen 45, Luyindula 64)
Sochaux 1 (Sverkos 52) Att: 34,915

Saturday, January 31
Auxerre 0
Lorient 0 Att: 11,972

Le Havre 2 (Alassane 12, 90)
Nancy 3 (Feret 16, Brison 31, N'Guemo 90) Att: 12,017

Le Mans 0
Nantes 2 (Poulard 53, Da Rocha 65) Att: 10,030

Monaco 1 (Licata 68)
Grenoble 0 Att: 6,710

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Hoarau 49, Luyindula 58)
Caen 0 Att: 39,187

Rennes 0
Toulouse 0 Att: 27,030

Valenciennes 1 (Pujol 77)
Nice 0 Att: 11,036

Sunday, February 1
Bordeaux 2 (Bellion 16, Gourcuff 61)
Lille 2 (Obraniak 48, Rami 57) Att: 28,197

Lyon 1 (Juninho 53)
Saint-Etienne 1 (Mirallas 49) Att: 38,590

Sochaux 1 (Erdinc 24)
Marseille 0 Att: 19,972

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lyon	22	12	7	3	27	14	43
Bordeaux	22	12	6	4	39	22	42
PSG	22	12	3	7	28	22	39
Marseille	22	10	8	4	37	25	38
Rennes	22	9	11	2	25	14	38
Toulouse	22	10	8	4	23	15	38
Lille	21	9	9	3	31	21	36
Nice	21	9	6	6	25	20	33
Lorient	22	7	8	7	27	25	29
Nancy	21	7	7	7	21	22	28
Monaco	22	7	6	9	26	27	27
Nantes	22	7	5	10	20	28	26
Le Mans	21	7	4	10	26	31	25
Grenoble	22	6	7	9	13	21	25
Caen	21	5	9	7	25	25	24
Auxerre	22	5	6	11	14	23	21
Saint-Etienne	22	6	3	13	17	31	21
Sochaux	22	3	11	8	21	27	20
Valenciennes	21	4	7	10	18	26	19
Le Havre	22	3	3	16	16	40	12

LEADING GOALSCORERS
13 Andre-Pierre Gignac (Toulouse)
13 Guillaume Hoarau (Paris Saint-Germain)
12 Fernando Cavenaghi (Bordeaux)
10 Karim Benzema (Lyon)
9 Michel Bastos (Lille)

FRENCH CUP – last 64

Jan 10: Pont-de-Roide 0 GFCO Ajaccio 1.
Jan 24: Concarneau 0 Lyon 6.

Last 32

Jan 20: Guingamp 2 Brest 0 (aet).
Jan 23: AC Ajaccio 2 Vannes OC 0; Dunkerque 0 Lille 3.
Jan 24: Boulogne-sur-Mer 3 Caen 1; Dijon 4 Villefranche/Saone 1; Lorient 2 Tours 1 (aet); Rennes 2 Saint-Etienne 0; Romorantin 0 Sedan 0 (aet; Sedan 6-5 on pens); Schirrhein 0 Toulouse 8; Troyes 1 Rodez 2; Vitre 1 Creteil 1 (aet; Vitre 9-8 on pens).
Jan 25: GFCO Ajaccio 0 Paris Saint-Germain 3; Grande-Synthe 1 Grenoble 3; Le Havre 0 Le Mans 1 (aet); Monaco 1 Nice 0.
Jan 28: Lyon 1 Marseille 0.

GERMANY

Friday, January 30
Hamburg 1 (Petric 44)
Bayern Munich 0 Att: 57,000

Saturday, January 31
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Frei 36)
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Helmes 63) Att: 73,700

Hannover 1 (Pinto 8)
Schalke 0 Att: 45,667

Hertha Berlin 2 (Pantelic 17, 50)
Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Kohler 53) Att: 39,847

1899 Hoffenheim 2 (Ba 28, Sanogo 63)
Energie Cottbus 0 Att: 30,150

Koln 1 (Radu 34)
Wolfsburg 1 (Grafite 73) Att: 49,000

Stuttgart 2 (Marica 67, Gomez 86)
Monchengladbach 0 Att: 41,300

Sunday, February 1
Bochum 2 (Fuchs 26, Klimowicz 65)
Karlsruhe 0 Att: 20,148

Werder Bremen 1 (Hugo Almeida 44)
Arminia Bielefeld 2 (Marx 24, Wichniarek 49) Att: 38,522

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hoffenheim	18	12	2	4	44	23	38
Hertha Berlin	18	11	3	4	29	21	36
Hamburg	18	11	3	4	27	24	36
Bayern	18	10	5	3	39	25	35
B Leverkusen	18	10	3	5	37	22	33
B Dortmund	18	7	9	2	28	20	30
Stuttgart	18	8	4	6	28	23	28
Wolfsburg	18	7	6	5	36	26	27
Schalke	18	7	6	5	24	17	27
Werder	18	7	5	6	40	30	26
Koln	18	7	2	9	20	26	23
Hannover	18	5	5	8	21	32	20
E Frankfurt	18	5	4	9	24	31	19
A Bielefeld	18	3	8	7	17	28	17
Bochum	18	2	8	8	21	30	14
Karlsruhe	18	4	1	13	15	34	13
E Cottbus	18	3	4	11	12	31	13
M'gladbach	18	3	2	13	18	37	11

LEADING GOALSCORERS
18 Vedad Ibisevic (1899 Hoffenheim)
13 Patrick Helmes (Bayer Leverkusen)
12 Grafite (Wolfsburg)
11 Artur Wichniarek (Arminia Bielefeld)
10 Milivoje Novakovic (Koln)
10 Claudio Pizarro (Werder Bremen)

GERMAN CUP – last 16

Jan 27: Carl Zeiss Jena 1 Schalke 4; Freiburg 1 Mainz 3; Hamburg 3 1860 Munich 1; Stuttgart 1 Bayern Munich 5.
Jan 28: Bayer Leverkusen 3 Energie Cottbus 1; Borussia Dortmund 1 Werder Bremen 2; Karlsruhe 0 Wehen Wiesbaden 1; Wolfsburg 5 Hansa Rostock 1.

GREECE

Jan 10: Panionios 2 Panserraikos 0; Panthrakikos 1 Panathinaikos 3; Olympiakos 2 Xanthi 1.
Jan 11: Thrasyvoulos 2 Levadiakos 1; Larisa 2 Asteras 1; OFI 2 Iraklis 3; Aris 0 Ergotelis 0; AEK 1 PAOK 0.
Jan 17: Panserraikos 0 Olympiakos 1; Asteras 3 Thrasyvoulos 0; Iraklis 0 AEK 1.
Jan 18: Levadiakos 4 Ergotelis 0; Xanthi 1 Larisa 1; OFI 2 Panionios 0; PAOK 2 Panthrakikos 0; Panathinaikos 4 Aris 0.
Jan 24: Ergotelis 1 Panathinaikos 0; Olympiakos 2 OFI 1.
Jan 25: Panthrakikos 1 Iraklis 0; Asteras 2 Levadiakos 0; Thrasyvoulos 1 Xanthi 1; Larisa 1 Panserraikos 1; Aris 0 PAOK 0; AEK 3 Panionios 0.
Jan 31: OFI 1 Larisa 2; Iraklis 0 Aris 1.
Feb 1: Panionios 3 Panthrakikos 0; Panserraikos 1 Thrasyvoulos 0; PAOK 2 Ergotelis 0; Levadiakos 1 Panathinaikos 2; Xanthi 0 Asteras 0; AEK 0 Olympiakos 1.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olympiakos	20	16	3	1	34	8	51
PAOK	20	11	7	2	23	9	40
Panathinaikos	20	11	6	3	36	15	39
AEK	20	8	10	2	24	17	34
Larisa	20	7	9	4	26	19	30
Panionios	20	8	4	8	26	25	28
Aris	20	7	7	6	15	18	28
Xanthi	20	5	10	5	13	12	25
Panthrakikos	20	7	4	9	12	21	25
Ergotelis	20	6	5	9	21	30	23
Levadiakos	20	6	4	10	17	20	22
Iraklis	20	5	7	8	15	20	22
Asteras	20	4	9	7	19	20	21
Panserraikos	20	3	6	11	11	27	15
OFI	20	3	5	12	21	35	14
Thrasyvoulos	20	3	4	13	16	33	13

HOLLAND

Friday, January 16
Heerenveen 3 (Bak Nielsen 4, Pranjic 43, Smarason 71)
Feyenoord 1 (Makaay 38) Att: 25,000

Saturday, January 17
De Graafschap 1 (Sahar 17)
Willem II 0 Att: 12,000

Den Haag 2 (Soltani 26, Derijck 51)
Heracles 2 (Van den Bergh 35, Boakye 79) Att: 10,131

NAC 1 (Zwaanswijk 32)
Utrecht 1 (Caluwe 90) Att: 16,000

Twente 2 (Nkufo 19, Perez 67)
Vitesse 1 (Sansoni 53) Att: 23,519

Sunday, January 18
NEC 2 (Zomer 50, El-Akchaoui 67)
Ajax 4 (Sulejmani 48, 55, Dani Fernandez og 78, Gabri 90) Att: 12,500

Roda JC 1 (Janssen 60)
PSV 1 (Simons pen 59) Att: 16,800

Sparta 1 (Godee 60)
Groningen 1 (Van de Laak 48) Att: 10,458

Volendam 0
AZ 2 (Ari 11, Mendes da Silva 79) Att: 6,256

Saturday, January 24
AZ 2 (Ari 11, Pocognoli 45)
De Graafschap 0 Att: 16,276

Feyenoord 1 (Slory 90)
Willem II 1 (Janse 51) Att: 44,250

Heerenveen 2 (Beerens 40, Pranjic pen 54)
Roda JC 0 Att: 25,300

PSV 2 (Salcido 14, Afellay 78)
NAC 2 (Loran 45, Kolkka 74) Att: 33,000

Sunday, January 25
Groningen 1 (Holla 39)
Ajax 0 Att: 22,000

Heracles 1 (Van den Bergh 83)
Twente 2 (Perez 45, Arnautovic 75) Att: 8,500

Utrecht 3 (Silberbauer 12, Van der Gun 20, Loval 39)
Sparta 3 (Strootman 6, Godee 37, Poepon 68) Att: 20,000

Vitesse 0
NEC 0 Att: 18,166

Volendam 0
Den Haag 1 (Buijs 76) Att: 4,855

Friday, January 30
Roda JC 3 (Addo 26, Oper 50, Cisse 53)
Heracles 1 (Schulmeister 89) Att: 13,840

Saturday, January 31
Ajax 0
Heerenveen 1 (Pranjic 59) Att: 50,333

Den Haag 0
Groningen 1 (Gonzalo 75) Att: 9,354

STANDINGS ON FEBRUARY 1

POS		TEAM	GOALS	FACTOR	PTS
1	Marc Janko	Salzburg (Aut)	30	1.5	45
2	Samuel Eto'o	Barcelona (Spa)	19	2	38
3	Vedad Ibisevic	1899 Hoffenheim (Ger)	18	2	36
4	David Villa	Valencia (Spa)	17	2	34
5	Lionel Messi	Barcelona (Spa)	16	2	32
6	Kris Boyd	Rangers (Sco)	20	1.5	30
	Marco Di Vaio	Bologna (Ita)	15	2	30
	Vagner Love	CSKA Moscow (Rus)	20	1.5	30
9	Stefan Maierhofer	Rapid Wien (Aut)	19	1.5	28.5
10	Nicolas Anelka	Chelsea (Eng)	14	2	28
	Diego Milito	Genoa (Ita)	14	2	28
12	Andre-Pierre Gignac	Toulouse (Fra)	13	2	26
	Patrick Helmes	Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)	13	2	26
	Guillaume Hoarau	Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)	13	2	26
	Zlatan Ibrahimovic	Internazionale (Ita)	13	2	26
16	Fernando Cavenaghi	Bordeaux (Fra)	12	2	24
	Mounir El Hamdaoui	AZ Alkmaar (Hol)	16	1.5	24
	Diego Forlan	Atletico Madrid (Spa)	12	2	24
	Alberto Gilardino	Fiorentina (Ita)	12	2	24
	Grafite	Wolfsburg (Ger)	12	2	24
	Rhys Griffiths	Llanelli (Wal)	24	1	24
	Thierry Henry	Barcelona (Spa)	12	2	24
	Gonzalo Higuain	Real Madrid (Spa)	12	2	24
	Daniel Nannskog	Stabaek (Nor)	16	1.5	24

NAC 1 (Kolkka 64)
Volendam 1 (Van Zaanen 70) Att: 16,760

Willem II 0
Vitesse 2 (Junker 60, Van Wolfswinkel 90) Att: 13,300

Sunday, February 1
De Graafschap 0
PSV 3 (Afellay 14, 74, Toivonen 37) Att: 12,000

NEC 1 (Koenders 90)
Feyenoord 0 Att: 12,500

Sparta 0
AZ 2 (Dembele 65, El Hamdaoui 85) Att: 10,832

Twente 0
Utrecht 0 Att: 23,950

Tuesday, February 3
Ajax 2 (Sulejmani 70, Suarez pen 72)
Heracles 2 (Van den Bergh 12, Schulmeister 31) Att: 46,355

Vitesse 1 (Hofs 84)
Heerenveen 0 Att: 17,563

Willem II 1 (Swinkels pen 5)
Volendam 2 (Van Zaanen 58, Schilder 85) Att: 12,500

Wednesday, February 4
AZ 1 (El Hamdaoui 76)
Roda JC 0 Att: 16,161

Feyenoord 1 (Biseswar 18)
Sparta 0 Att: 45,000

Groningen 2 (Berg pen 26, Van de Laak 61)
NEC 0 Att: 21,700

Twente 4 (Arnautovic 22, Wisgerhof 31, Elia 60, Denneboom 90)
NAC 1 (Idabdelhay 62) Att: 22,613

Utrecht 3 (Van der Gun 30, 45, 83)
De Graafschap 0 Att: 19,500

Thursday, February 5
PSV 6 (Dzsudzsak 31, 46, 53, Toivonen 45, Amrabat 63, 68)
Den Haag 0 Att: 32,000

HOLLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AZ	21	17	2	2	44	11	53
Twente	21	13	5	3	41	19	44
Ajax	21	13	3	5	47	23	42
PSV	21	11	5	5	42	20	38
Heerenveen	21	11	5	5	42	39	38
Groningen	21	11	3	7	41	25	36
NAC	21	9	5	7	31	33	32
Utrecht	21	8	7	6	30	25	31
NEC	21	8	6	7	28	24	30
Willem II	21	7	4	10	26	32	25
Feyenoord	21	6	5	10	33	31	23
Heracles	21	5	7	9	23	35	22
Vitesse	21	5	7	9	19	32	22
Sparta	21	5	5	11	34	48	20
Den Haag	21	5	4	12	22	35	19
Roda JC	21	4	6	11	25	39	18
De Graafschap	21	4	4	13	13	42	16
Volendam	21	4	3	14	22	50	15

LEADING GOALSCORERS
17 Mounir El Hamdaoui (AZ)
14 Marcus Berg (Groningen)
14 Danijel Pranjic (Heerenveen)
13 Frank Demouge (Willem II)
12 Matthew Amoah (NAC)

DUTCH CUP – last 16

Jan 20: Dordrecht 0 De Graafschap 1; Feyenoord 0 Heerenveen 3.
Jan 21: AZ 3 Achilles '29 0; NAC 2 Groningen 2 (aet; NAC 7-6 on pens); NEC 2 Sparta 1; Roda JC 2 Lienden 0 (aet); Volendam 3 Excelsior 0.
Jan 28: Den Haag 1 Twente 5.

HUNGARY

HUNGARY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Debrecen	15	10	3	2	33	14	33
Ujpest	15	8	6	1	27	17	30
Vasas	15	9	1	5	27	23	28
Szombathely	15	7	3	5	22	13	24
Nyiregyhaza	15	6	6	3	20	14	24
Zalaegerszeg	15	6	4	5	25	22	22
Kaposvar	15	6	3	6	26	21	21
Kecskemet	15	6	3	6	23	19	21
Fehervar	15	6	3	6	17	19	21
MTK	15	5	4	6	20	22	19
Honved	15	5	4	6	22	25	19
Diosgyor	15	5	4	6	17	26	19
Gyor	15	5	3	7	23	19	18
Paks	15	5	3	7	21	31	18
Siofok	15	2	2	11	9	27	8
Rakospalota	15	2	2	11	19	39	8

ITALY

Saturday, January 10
Genoa 3 (Biava 18, Jankovic 48, Thiago Motta 84)
Torino 0 Att: 21,000

Inter 1 (Ibrahimovic 77)
Cagliari 1 (Acquafresca 65) Att: 45,171

Sunday, January 11
Bologna 1 (Di Vaio pen 45)
Chievo 1 (Pellissier 43) Att: 15,840

Fiorentina 1 (Felipe Melo 24)
Lecce 2 (Giacomazzi 6, Castillo 28) Att: 27,551

Juventus 1 (Del Piero 33)
Siena 0 Att: 20,859

Napoli 1 (Maggio 80)
Catania 0 Att: 39,093

Palermo 3 (Miccoli 22, Bresciano 39, Cavani 81)
Atalanta 2 (Floccari 65, Ferreira Pinto 78) Att: 19,004

Reggina 2 (Corradi pen 4, Cozza 62)
Lazio 3 (Pandev 14, 22, 75) Att: 9,860

Roma 2 (Vucinic 22, 72)
Milan 2 (Alexandre Pato 48, 53) Att: 53,444

Udinese 1 (Domizzi 62)
Sampdoria 1 (Delvecchio 57) Att: 14,356

Wednesday, January 14
Roma 2 (Julio Baptista 21, 53)
Sampdoria 0 Att: 32,304

Saturday, January 17
Milan 1 (Alexandre Pato 7)
Fiorentina 0 Att: 65,692

Siena 1 (Frick 75)
Reggina 0 Att: 9,000

Sunday, January 18
Atalanta 3 (Floccari 18, Doni 28, 33)
Inter 1 (Ibrahimovic 90) Att: 16,983

Cagliari 2 (Conti 4, Biondini 20)
Udinese 0 Att: 10,000

Catania 1 (Paolucci 85)
Bologna 2 (Di Vaio 49, Adailton 54) Att: 19,000

Chievo 2 (Marcolini 32, 74)
Napoli 1 (Lavezzi 53) Att: 10,000

Lazio 1 (Ledesma 25)
Juventus 1 (Mellberg 30) Att: 60,000

Lecce 0
Genoa 2 (Jankovic 69, Sculli 90) Att: 8,000

Sampdoria 0
Palermo 2 (Bresciano 45, 58) Att: 30,000

Torino 0
Roma 1 (Julio Baptista 90) Att: 15,000

Saturday, January 24
Juventus 1 (Marchisio 21)
Fiorentina 0 Att: 22,600

Reggina 0
Chievo 1 (Italiano 90) Att: 10,200

Sunday, January 25
Bologna 1 (Di Vaio pen 9)
Milan 4 (Seedorf 13, Kaka pen 17, 43, Beckham 59) Att: 33,691

Genoa 1 (Milito 74)
Catania 1 (Martinez 68) Att: 25,007

Inter 1 (Adriano 45)
Sampdoria 0 Att: 45,359

Lazio 1 (Rocchi 3)
Cagliari 4 (Jeda 5, 9, Acquafresca pen 21, Matri 41) Att: 29,523

Lecce 3 (Munari 12, 45, Castillo 73)
Torino 3 (Saumel 47, Dellafiore 56, Natali 77) Att: 7,888

Napoli 0
Roma 3 (Mexes 18, Juan 32, Vucinic 49) Att: 60,240

Palermo 3 (Simplicio 17, 53, Cavani 57)
Udinese 2 (Pepe 2, Di Natale 63) Att: 18,812

Siena 1 (Frick 44)
Atalanta 0 Att: 9,318

Wednesday, January 28
Atalanta 0
Bologna 1 (Volpi 80) Att: 10,642

Cagliari 1 (Acquafresca 37)
Siena 0

Catania 0
Inter 2 (Stankovic 5, Ibrahimovic 71) Att: 20,738

Chievo 1 (Mantovani 88)
Lecce 1 (Vives 56) Att: 9,373

Fiorentina 2 (Santana 47, Montolivo 79)
Napoli 1 (Vitale 49) Att: 28,863

Milan 1 (Beckham 33)
Genoa 1 (Milito 87) Att: 49,907

Roma 2 (Totti 24, Brighi 45)
Palermo 1 (Cavani 31) Att: 34,322

Sampdoria 3 (Delvecchio 13, Cassano 52, Stankevicius 55)
Lazio 1 (Rocchi 30) Att: 21,299

Torino 0
Reggina 0 Att: 15,098

Udinese 2 (Quagliarella 20, Di Natale 74)
Juventus 1 (Iaquinta pen 77)

Saturday, January 31
Juventus 2 (Sissoko 31, Nedved 38)
Cagliari 3 (Biondini 16, Jeda 54, Matri 78) Att: 25,150

Napoli 2 (Lavezzi 24, Hamsik 27)
Udinese 2 (Di Natale pen 32, Quagliarella 45) Att: 40,100

Sunday, February 1
Atalanta 1 (Guarente 24)
Catania 0 Att: 9,449

Chievo 1 (Rigoni 72)
Sampdoria 1 (Pazzini 70) Att: 10,511

Genoa 1 (Criscito 88)
Palermo 0 Att: 24,234

Inter 1 (Burdisso 58)
Torino 1 (Bianchi 47) Att: 43,040

Lazio 0
Milan 3 (Alexandre Pato 42, Ambrosini 47, Kaka 83) Att: 40,544

Reggina 2 (Corradi pen 43, Cozza 81)
Roma 2 (Pizarro 45, 57) Att: 9,926

Siena 1 (Ghezzal 79)
Lecce 2 (Tiribocchi 15, Castillo 54) Att: 8,965

Monday, February 2
Bologna 1 (Mingazzini 52)
Fiorentina 3 (Mutu 6, 16, Gilardino 90)

ITALY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter	22	15	5	2	37	16	50
Milan	22	13	5	4	39	22	44
Juventus	22	13	4	5	36	19	43
Genoa	22	11	7	4	32	19	40
Fiorentina	22	12	2	8	31	20	38
Roma	22	11	4	7	33	28	37
Cagliari	22	10	4	8	30	25	34
Napoli	22	10	4	8	30	25	34
Palermo	22	10	2	10	30	28	32
Lazio	22	9	4	9	32	35	31
Atalanta	22	9	3	10	27	25	30
Udinese	22	7	6	9	32	35	27
Catania	22	7	5	10	20	27	26
Siena	22	7	4	11	16	22	25
Sampdoria	22	6	6	10	20	26	24
Lecce	22	4	10	8	22	32	22
Bologna	22	5	7	10	25	36	22
Torino	22	4	6	12	22	37	18
Chievo	22	4	6	12	15	31	18
Reggina	22	3	6	13	19	40	15

LEADING GOALSCORERS
15 Marco Di Vaio (Bologna)
14 Diego Milito (Genoa)
13 Alberto Gilardino (Fiorentina)
13 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Inter)
11 Amauri (Juventus)
11 Antonio Di Natale (Udinese)

ITALIAN CUP – last 16

Jan 13: Inter 3 Genoa 1 (aet).
Jan 14: Juventus 3 Catania 0.

Quarter-finals

Jan 21: Inter 2 Roma 1; Udinese 1 Sampdoria 1 (aet; Sampdoria 4-1 on pens).
Jan 22: Lazio 3 Torino 1.
Feb 4: Juventus 0 Napoli 0 (aet; Juventus 4-3 on pens).

POLAND

POLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Lech	17	11	3	3	32	11	36
Legia	17	11	3	3	31	10	36
Polonia W	17	10	5	2	25	9	35
Wisla	17	10	3	4	28	13	33
Belchatow	17	10	1	6	22	18	31
Slask	17	8	6	3	26	20	30
Arka	17	6	5	6	16	17	23
Ruch	17	6	4	7	12	17	22
Polonia B	17	6	3	8	21	26	21
Jagiellonia	17	4	6	7	13	19	18
Lechia	17	5	3	9	15	26	18
Odra	17	4	5	8	14	22	17
LKS	17	4	4	9	11	24	16
Piast	17	4	3	10	8	17	15
Cracovia	17	3	5	9	10	21	14
Gornik	17	3	3	11	8	22	12

PORTUGAL

Saturday, January 10
Guimaraes 0
Estrela Amadora 0

Sporting Lisbon 2 (Vukcevic 11, Liedson 82)
Maritimo 0

Sunday, January 11
Benfica 1 (David Luiz 45)
Sporting Braga 0

Leixoes 0
Setubal 0

Naval 2 (Marcelinho 63, Bolivia 77)
Academica 1 (Sougou 90)

Pacos Ferreira 2 (Andre Pinto 64, Carlos Carneiro 80)
Nacional 3 (Ruben Micael 11, Nene 14, 36)

Porto 0
Trofense 0

Rio Ave 0
Belenenses 1 (Diakite 55)

Friday, January 23
Belenenses 0
Benfica 0

Maritimo 0
Leixoes 0

Saturday, January 24
Estrela Amadora 2 (Varela 44, Rui Varela 85)
Rio Ave 0

Nacional 1 (Nene 7)
Sporting Lisbon 1 (Vukcevic 45)

Setubal 0
Naval 1 (Marinho 19)

Sporting Braga 0
Porto 2 (Rodriguez 20, Lopez 31)

Trofense 1 (Reguila 6)
Pacos Ferreira 3 (Dede 21, Ferreira 69, Cristiano 83)

Sunday, January 25
Academica 2 (Lito 44, Diogo Gomes 48)
Guimaraes 1 (Nuno Assis 55)

Friday, January 30
Setubal 2 (Andre Marques 11, Ricardo Chaves 37)
Guimaraes 4 (Marquinho 15, Nuno Assis 34, 81, 90)

Saturday, January 31
Benfica 1 (Mantorras 70)
Rio Ave 0

Trofense 0
Sporting Lisbon 0

Sunday, February 1
Academica 2 (Sougou 47, Lito 61)
Estrela Amadora 2 (Anselmo 10, Varela 70)

Belenenses 1 (Saulo 34)
Porto 3 (Hulk 21, Rodriguez 22, L Gonzalez 86)

Maritimo 1 (Aquino 88)
Naval 0

Nacional 0
Leixoes 0

Sporting Braga 2 (Renteria 5, Meyong 35)
Pacos Ferreira 0

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Porto	16	10	4	2	29	12	34
Benfica	16	9	6	1	26	12	33
Sporting L	16	9	4	3	19	8	31
Leixoes	16	7	7	2	17	12	28
Maritimo	16	7	5	4	18	14	26
S Braga	16	7	5	4	16	8	26
Nacional	16	7	5	4	23	19	26
Guimaraes	16	5	6	5	17	17	21
E Amadora	16	5	5	6	14	20	20
Naval	16	5	4	7	14	16	19
Academica	16	4	6	6	12	16	18
P Ferreira	16	4	3	9	20	28	15
Belenenses	16	3	5	8	13	25	14
Trofense	16	3	4	9	13	21	13
Setubal	16	3	3	10	9	22	12
Rio Ave	16	2	4	10	10	20	10

LEADING GOALSCORERS
10 Nene (Nacional)
8 William (Pacos Ferreira)
7 Albert Meyong (Sporting Braga)
7 Wesley (Leixoes)

PORTUGUESE CUP – quarter-finals

Jan 28: Pacos Ferreira 5 Naval 3; Porto 1 Leixoes 0.
Jan 29: Valdevez 1 Nacional 1 (aet; Nacional 3-1 on pens).

Still to play: Guimaraes v Estrela Amadora (Feb 17)

ROMANIA

ROMANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	17	11	2	4	25	13	35
Urziceni	17	11	1	5	28	14	34
Timisoara*	17	10	5	2	32	20	29
CFR	17	8	5	4	24	13	29
Steaua	17	7	8	2	24	13	29
Univ Craiova	17	7	7	3	23	16	28
Rapid	17	8	4	5	22	17	28
Arges	17	8	3	6	24	21	27
Vaslui	17	7	4	6	19	16	25
Otelul	17	6	5	6	22	20	23
Brasov	17	5	8	4	14	13	23
Gloria Bistrita	17	6	3	8	17	17	21
Pandurii	17	5	6	6	17	22	21
Farul	17	5	4	8	14	24	19
Poli Iasi	17	4	4	9	13	25	16
Gaz Metan	17	4	3	10	18	31	15
Otopeni	17	2	3	12	14	31	9
Gloria Buzau	17	0	3	14	6	30	3

**6pts deducted for non-compliance with CAS ruling relating to club identity*

SCOTLAND

Tuesday, January 13
Kilmarnock 1 (Russell 10)
Aberdeen 2 (Miller 30, 59) Att: 4,354

Saturday, January 17
Hamilton 1 (Mensing pen 39)
Inverness 0 Att: 3,070

Hibernian 2 (Jones 14, Riordan 84)
St Mirren 0 Att: 10,317

Kilmarnock 0
Hearts 2 (Aguiar 61, Karipidis 80) Att: 5,469

Rangers 3 (Boyd pen 45, 80, Davis 90)
Falkirk 1 (Lovell 12) Att: 48,811

Sunday, January 18
Aberdeen 4 (McDonald 24, Duff 31, Diamond 75, 78)
Celtic 2 (S Brown 25, McDonald 73) Att: 18,100

Dundee United 0
Motherwell 4 (Fitzpatrick 23, Klimpl 27, Clarkson 33, Porter 63) Att: 7,090

Saturday, January 24
Aberdeen 0
Rangers 0 Att: 20,441

Celtic 3 (McDonald 3, 76, McManus 9)
Hibernian 1 (Jones 17) Att: 58,930

Dundee United 3 (Feeney pen 72, 86, Buaben 84)
St Mirren 2 (Ross 17, Mehmet pen 73) Att: 6,556

Hearts 3 (Obua 39, 79, Wallace 90)
Inverness 2 (Mihadjuks 56, Imrie 88) Att: 13,224

Motherwell 1 (Clarkson 43)
Falkirk 1 (Holden 53) Att: 5,018

Sunday, January 25
Kilmarnock 0
Hamilton 1 (Offiong 46) Att: 5,063

Saturday, January 31
Falkirk 1 (Higdon 55)
Aberdeen 0 Att: 5,605

Hamilton 2 (Mensing 12, pen 52)
Hearts 0 Att: 3,567

Hibernian 1 (Riordan 7)
Motherwell 1 (Clarkson pen 77) Att: 10,903

Rangers 2 (Fleck pen 78, Lafferty 90)
Dundee United 0 Att: 49,918

St Mirren 1 (Wyness 83)
Kilmarnock 1 (Kyle 29) Att: 7,542

Sunday, February 1
Inverness 0
Celtic 0 Att: 7,007

SCOTLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Celtic	24	17	4	3	52	25	55
Rangers	24	16	5	3	53	18	53
Dundee Utd	24	10	8	6	33	30	38
Hearts	24	11	5	8	25	26	38
Aberdeen	24	11	4	9	29	25	37
Hibernian	24	8	7	9	30	32	31
Motherwell	24	8	5	11	27	33	29
Hamilton	24	9	2	13	23	36	29
Kilmarnock	24	8	3	13	23	32	27
St Mirren	24	7	5	12	19	28	26
Falkirk	24	5	7	12	25	35	22
Inverness	24	5	3	16	22	41	18

LEADING GOALSCORERS
20 Kris Boyd (Rangers)
12 Georgios Samaras (Celtic)
9 Scott McDonald (Celtic)
9 Chris Porter (Motherwell)

SCOTTISH CUP – last 32

Jan 10: Airdrie 2 Spartans 1; Alloa 1 Aberdeen 2; Ayr 2 Kilmarnock 2; Celtic 2 Dundee 1; Dunfermline 2 Clyde 0; Falkirk 4 Queen of the South 2; Inverness 3 Partick 0; Peterhead 2 Queen's Park 2; Ross County 0 Hamilton 1; Stenhousemuir 0 East Fife 1.
Jan 11: East Stirling 0 Dundee United 4; Hibernian 0 Hearts 2.
Jan 13: Brechin 1 St Mirren 3; Forfar 6 Forres Mechanics 1; St Johnstone 0 Rangers 2.
Feb 2: Inverurie Locos 0 Motherwell 3.

Replays
Jan 20: Queen's Park 1 Peterhead 0.
Jan 22: Kilmarnock 3 Ayr 1.

SERBIA

SERBIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Partizan	17	11	4	2	32	8	37
Vojvodina	17	11	1	5	20	10	34
Red Star	17	9	3	5	29	18	30
Javor	17	8	6	3	23	15	30
Hajduk	17	6	5	6	14	14	23
Borac	17	5	8	4	16	17	23
OFK	17	6	3	8	14	26	21
Jagodina	17	6	2	9	15	26	20
Rad	17	3	8	6	12	16	17
Cukaricki	17	4	4	9	14	20	16
Banat	17	4	4	9	12	22	16
Napredak	17	3	4	10	13	22	13

SPAIN

Saturday, January 10
Deportivo La Coruna 1 (Bodipo 34)
Sevilla 3 (Luis Fabiano 50, Renato 78, Diego Capel 90) Att: 20,000

Valencia 3 (Baraja 1, Villa 10, Edu 79)
Villarreal 3 (Fuentes 45, Llorente 76, Rossi pen 83) Att: 40,000

Sunday, January 11
Atletico Madrid 2 (Antonio Lopez 15, Forlan 90)
Athletic Bilbao 3 (Koikili 45, Dominguez og 50, Llorente 65) Att: 42,000

Betis 1 (Emana 38)
Malaga 2 (Apono pen 18, Eliseu 90) Att: 40,000

Espanyol 2 (Roman 62, Pareja 90)
Almeria 2 (Uche 4, 54) Att: 11,325

Mallorca 0
Real Madrid 3 (Robben 3, Raul 17, Sergio Ramos 66) Att: 18,000

Numancia 2 (Barkero pen 8, Aranda 80)
Getafe 0 Att: 6,000

Osasuna 2 (Miguel Flano 62, Pandiani 72)
Barcelona 3 (Eto'o 44, Xavi 80, Messi 84) Att: 18,388

Racing Santander 1 (Jonathan Pereira 33)
Recreativo 1 (Camunas 42) Att: 16,453

Sporting Gijon 2 (Carmelo 18, David Barral 35)
Valladolid 1 (Garcia Calvo 88) Att: 21,000

Saturday, January 17
Barcelona 5 (Messi 21, Henry 27, 82, Eto'o 41, pen 86)
Deportivo La Coruna 0 Att: 65,145

Sevilla 1 (Renato 81)
Numancia 0 Att: 40,000

Sunday, January 18
Almeria 1 (Uche 6)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Sinama-Pongolle 22) Att: 11,313

Athletic Bilbao 3 (Gabilondo 17, Javi Martinez 41, Llorente 90)
Valencia 2 (Villa 2, Morientes 29) Att: 36,000

Getafe 0
Racing Santander 1 (Zigic 24) Att: 9,000

Malaga 4 (Adrian 35, Apono pen 57, Baha pen 84, Luque 90)
Espanyol 0 Att: 21,100

Real Madrid 3 (Sergio Ramos 49, Higuain 63, Robben 90)
Osasuna 1 (Nekounam 19) Att: 73,000

Recreativo 2 (Jorge og 5, Adrian Colunga 54)
Sporting Gijon 0 Att: 18,000

Valladolid 1 (Luis Prieto 22)
Betis 3 (Xisco 16, Sergio Garcia 62, 90) Att: 15,452

Villarreal 2 (Capdevila 29, Rossi pen 33)
Mallorca 0 Att: 16,000

Saturday, January 24
Barcelona 4 (Messi 50, 77, Eto'o 54, Henry 72)
Numancia 1 (Barkero 62) Att: 47,400

Villarreal 1 (Rossi 28)
Osasuna 1 (Dady 64) Att: 17,000

Sunday, January 25
Almeria 2 (Juanma Ortiz 26, Uche 40)
Athletic Bilbao 1 (Del Olmo 67) Att: 10,500

Getafe 5 (Soldado 15, 58, 73, Granero 17, Uche 71)
Sporting Gijon 1 (David Barral 45) Att: 8,000

Malaga 1 (Apono 22)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Heitinga 44) Att: 24,000

Mallorca 3 (Jurado 8, 42, Marti pen 41)
Valencia 1 (Vicente 73) Att: 17,000

Real Madrid 1 (Raul 39)
Deportivo La Coruna 0 Att: 65,000

Recreativo 1 (Camunas 73)
Betis 0 Att: 18,600

Sevilla 0
Racing Santander 2 (Cesar Navas 23, Zigic 46) Att: 40,000

Valladolid 1 (Goitom 41)
Espanyol 1 (Sergio Sanchez 78) Att: 13,500

Saturday, January 31
Athletic Bilbao 3 (Yeste 37, Llorente 71, Susaeta 86)
Malaga 2 (Luque 3, Lolo 63) Att: 37,000

Numancia 0
Real Madrid 2 (Raul 48, Robben 56) Att: 9,200

Sunday, February 1
Atletico Madrid 1 (Garcia Calvo og 53)
Valladolid 2 (Luis Prieto 50, Victor pen 78)

Betis 2 (Juanma 8, Gonzalez 10)
Getafe 2 (Uche 63, 71)

Deportivo La Coruna 3 (Lafita 1, 61, Riki 67)
Villarreal 0 Att: 16,000

Espanyol 1 (Pareja 62)
Recreativo 1 (Marco Ruben 90) Att: 21,915

Osasuna 1 (Pandiani 3)
Mallorca 0 Att: 19,031

Racing Santander 1 (Zigic 56)
Barcelona 2 (Messi 65, 81)

Sporting Gijon 1 (Diego Castro 17)
Sevilla 0 Att: 25,000

Valencia 3 (Joaquin 6, Villa pen 29, 61)
Almeria 2 (Negredo 22, 64) Att: 15,000

SPAIN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	21	18	2	1	65	15	56
Real Madrid	21	14	2	5	44	27	44
Sevilla	21	11	5	5	28	19	38
Valencia	21	11	4	6	42	32	37
Villarreal	21	9	7	5	33	29	34
Dep Coruna	21	10	3	8	26	28	33
At Madrid	21	9	5	7	44	33	32
Malaga	21	9	5	7	34	31	32
Ath Bilbao	21	8	5	8	31	33	29
R Santander	21	7	7	7	24	25	28
Valladolid	21	8	3	10	30	32	27
Sporting Gijon	21	9	0	12	28	44	27
Getafe	21	6	7	8	31	33	25
Almeria	21	6	6	9	24	32	24
Recreativo	21	6	6	9	19	29	24
Betis	21	6	4	11	27	29	22
Numancia	21	6	2	13	25	43	20
Osasuna	21	3	8	10	22	30	17
Espanyol	21	3	8	10	19	34	17
Mallorca	21	4	5	12	21	39	17

LEADING GOALSCORERS

19 Samuel Eto'o (Barcelona)
17 David Villa (Valencia)
16 Lionel Messi (Barcelona)
12 Diego Forlan (Atletico Madrid)
12 Thierry Henry (Barcelona)
12 Gonzalo Higuain (Real Madrid)

SPANISH CUP – last 16

1st legs - January 6-8; 2nd legs - January 14/15

Atletico Madrid v Barcelona
1-3, 1-2 (agg 2-5)
Mallorca v Almeria
3-1, 1-1 (agg 4-2)
Osasuna v Athletic Bilbao
1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)
Poli Ejido v Espanyol
3-2, 0-1 (agg 3-3; Espanyol on away goals)
Racing Santander v Valencia
1-1, 1-3 (aet) (agg 2-4)
Real Union v Betis
0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)
Sevilla v Deportivo La Coruna
2-1, 3-0 (agg 5-1)
Sporting Gijon v Valladolid
3-1, 1-2 (agg 4-3)

Quarter-finals

1st legs - January 21/22; 2nd legs - January 28/29

Athletic Bilbao v Sporting Gijon
0-0, 2-1 (agg 2-1)
Espanyol v Barcelona
0-0, 2-3 (agg 2-3)
Mallorca v Betis
1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Valencia v Sevilla
3-2, 1-2 (agg 4-4; Sevilla on away goals)

SWITZERLAND

SWITZERLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zurich	18	13	3	2	42	16	42
Basle	18	12	2	4	36	21	38
Young Boys	18	9	5	4	37	21	32
Grasshopper	17	7	7	3	27	15	28
Aarau	17	6	6	5	21	22	24
Neuchatel X	18	4	6	8	23	28	18
Sion	17	4	5	8	18	30	17
Bellinzona	17	3	5	9	17	30	14
Vaduz	17	3	5	9	10	32	14
Lucerne	17	3	2	12	16	32	11

TURKEY

Jan 23: Ankaraspor 3 Konyaspor 0.
Jan 24: Ankaragucu 0 Antalyaspor 1; Eskisehirspor 1 Gaziantepspor 1; Kayserispor 1 Genclerbirligi 3; Sivasspor 2 Galatasaray 0; Besiktas 1 Denizlispor 0.
Jan 25: Bursaspor 2 Istanbul BB 0; Kocaelispor 4 Hacettepe 0; Fenerbahce 0 Trabzonspor 0.
Jan 31: Kayserispor 0 Sivasspor 0; Kocaelispor 0 Genclerbirligi 2; Ankaraspor 0 Trabzonspor 2; Denizlispor 0 Galatasaray 2.
Feb 1: Ankaragucu 1 Konyaspor 3; Bursaspor 0 Hacettepe 0; Eskisehirspor 6 Istanbul BB 1; Fenerbahce 1 Gaziantepspor 1; Besiktas 1 Antalyaspor 0.

TURKEY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sivasspor	18	11	5	2	30	12	38
Trabzonspor	18	11	5	2	26	14	38
Galatasaray	18	11	3	4	40	21	36
Fenerbahce	18	10	4	4	32	19	34
Besiktas	18	10	4	4	29	18	34
Ankaraspor	18	10	3	5	27	14	33
Kayserispor	18	7	7	4	18	10	28
Gaziantepspor	18	7	6	5	25	23	27
Bursaspor	18	7	5	6	23	24	26
Eskisehirspor	18	5	7	6	26	26	22
Genclerbirligi	18	5	5	8	23	26	20
Konyaspor	18	5	5	8	18	27	20
Istanbul BB	18	5	4	9	18	29	19
Antalyaspor	18	3	7	8	17	25	16
Denizlispor	18	4	3	11	22	34	15
Ankaragucu	18	3	6	9	15	27	15
Kocaelispor	18	3	3	12	23	42	12
Hacettepe	18	2	4	12	9	30	10

UKRAINE

UKRAINE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	17	14	1	2	42	11	43
Metalist	17	11	4	2	29	12	37
Metalurh D	17	10	3	4	23	12	33
Vorskla	17	9	6	2	19	10	33
Shakhtar	17	8	7	2	25	12	31
Metalurh Z	17	7	6	4	17	15	27
Dnipro	17	6	6	5	15	13	24
Zorya	17	5	6	6	18	25	21
Chornomorets	17	6	2	9	18	21	20
Karpaty	17	4	7	6	16	21	19
Kryvbas	17	4	7	6	14	20	19
Arsenal	17	3	5	9	12	21	14
Tavriya	17	3	5	9	19	31	14
Illichivets	17	3	3	11	16	30	12
Lviv	17	3	3	11	11	25	12
Kharkiv	17	0	9	8	10	25	9

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Preliminary round

1st legs - January 27-29; 2nd legs - February 3-5

Anzoategui (Ven) v Deportivo Cuenca (Ecu)
2-0, 0-3 (agg 2-3)
El Nacional (Ecu) v Nacional (Par)
0-5, 3-3 (agg 3-8)
Independiente Medellin (Col) v Penarol (Uru)
4-0, 0-0 (agg 4-0)
Palmeiras (Bra) v Real Potosi (Bol)
5-1, 2-0 (agg 7-1)
Sporting Cristal (Per) v Estudiantes (Arg)
2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2; Estudiantes on away goals)
Universidad de Chile (Chl) v Pachuca (Mex)
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2; Univ de Chile on away goals)

Winners enter group stage

Group stage draw & schedule

Group 1

Colo Colo (Chl)
LDU Quito (Ecu)
Palmeiras (Bra)
Sport Recife (Bra)

Feb 17 LDU Quito-Palmeiras
Feb 18 Colo Colo-Sport Recife
Mar 3 Palmeiras-Colo Colo
Mar 4 Sport Recife-LDU Quito
Mar 12 Colo Colo-LDU Quito
Apr 8 Sport Recife-Palmeiras
Apr 9 LDU Quito-Colo Colo
Apr 15 Palmeiras-Sport Recife
Apr 21 Palmeiras-LDU Quito
Apr 22 Sport Recife-Colo Colo
Apr 29 Colo Colo-Palmeiras
Apr 29 LDU Quito-Sport Recife

Group 2

Boca Juniors (Arg)
Deportivo Cuenca (Ecu)
Deportivo Tachira (Ven)
Guarani (Par)

Feb 10 Guarani-Dep Tachira
Feb 17 Boca Juniors-Dep Cuenca
Feb 24 Dep Cuenca-Guarani
Mar 4 Dep Tachira-Boca Juniors
Mar 11 Dep Tachira-Dep Cuenca
Mar 17 Dep Cuenca-Dep Tachira
Mar 18 Guarani-Boca Juniors
Apr 9 Boca Juniors-Guarani
Apr 16 Dep Tachira-Guarani
Apr 22 Dep Cuenca-Boca Juniors
Apr 30 Boca Juniors-Dep Tachira
Apr 30 Guarani-Dep Cuenca

Group 3

Nacional (Par)
Nacional (Uru)
River Plate (Arg)
Universidad San Martin Porres (Per)

Feb 12 Nacional (U)-Univ SMP
Feb 12 River Plate-Nacional (P)
Feb 18 Nacional (P)-Nacional (U)
Mar 5 Univ SMP-River Plate
Mar 12 Univ SMP-Nacional (P)
Mar 19 Nacional (U)-River Plate
Apr 7 Nacional (P)-Univ SMP
Apr 7 River Plate-Nacional (U)
Apr 21 Univ SMP-Nacional (U)
Apr 23 Nacional (P)-River Plate
Apr 30 Nacional (U)-Nacional (P)
Apr 30 River Plate-Univ SMP

Group 4

America (Col)
Defensor Sporting (Uru)
Independiente Medellin (Col)
Sao Paulo (Bra)

Feb 10 Defensor-America
Feb 18 Sao Paulo-Indep Medellin
Feb 24 Indep Medellin-Defensor
Mar 5 America-Sao Paulo
Mar 10 America-Indep Medellin
Mar 17 Indep Medellin-America
Mar 18 Defensor-Sao Paulo
Apr 9 Sao Paulo-Defensor
Apr 15 Indep Medellin-Sao Paulo
Apr 16 America-Defensor
Apr 22 Defensor-Indep Medellin
Apr 22 Sao Paulo-America

Group 5

Cruzeiro (Bra)
Deportivo Quito (Ecu)
Estudiantes (Arg)
Universitario (Bol)

Feb 12 Universitario-Dep Quito
Feb 19 Cruzeiro-Estudiantes
Feb 25 Dep Quito-Cruzeiro
Feb 26 Estudiantes-Universitario
Mar 4 Universitario-Cruzeiro
Mar 10 Dep Quito-Estudiantes
Mar 18 Cruzeiro-Universitario
Mar 19 Estudiantes-Dep Quito
Apr 8 Estudiantes-Cruzeiro
Apr 14 Dep Quito-Universitario
Apr 23 Cruzeiro-Dep Quito
Apr 23 Universitario-Estudiantes

Group 6

Caracas (Ven)
Everton (Chl)
Guadalajara (Mex)
Lanus (Arg)

Feb 11 Lanus-Guadalajara
Feb 17 Everton-Caracas
Feb 25 Caracas-Lanus
Feb 25 Guadalajara-Everton
Mar 3 Caracas-Guadalajara
Mar 11 Everton-Lanus
Mar 11 Guadalajara-Caracas
Mar 17 Lanus-Everton
Apr 14 Caracas-Everton
Apr 14 Guadalajara-Lanus
Apr 28 Everton-Guadalajara
Apr 28 Lanus-Caracas

Group 7

Aurora (Bol)
Chico (Col)
Gremio (Bra)
Universidad de Chile (Chl)

Feb 10 Aurora-Chico
Feb 25 Gremio-Univ de Chile
Mar 4 Univ de Chile-Aurora
Mar 11 Chico-Gremio
Mar 18 Chico-Univ de Chile
Mar 25 Aurora-Gremio
Apr 7 Gremio-Aurora
Apr 8 Univ de Chile-Chico
Apr 15 Univ de Chile-Gremio
Apr 16 Chico-Aurora
Apr 28 Aurora-Univ de Chile
Apr 28 Gremio-Chico

Group 8

Libertad (Par)
San Lorenzo (Arg)
San Luis (Mex)
Universitario (Per)

Feb 11 Libertad-Universitario
Feb 11 San Lorenzo-San Luis
Feb 19 Universitario-San Lorenzo
Feb 26 San Luis-Libertad
Mar 5 Libertad-San Lorenzo
Mar 10 Universitario-San Luis
Mar 18 San Lorenzo-Libertad
Mar 18 San Luis-Universitario
Apr 7 Universitario-Libertad
Apr 8 San Luis-San Lorenzo
Apr 28 Libertad-San Luis
Apr 28 San Lorenzo-Universitario

Top two in each group qualify for 1st knockout rnd

ARGENTINA

SUMMER TOURNAMENT

Jan 10: Independiente 4 Racing Club 0.
Jan 13: River Plate 1 Independiente 1.
Jan 14: Racing Club 1 San Lorenzo 0.
Jan 17: Boca Juniors 0 San Lorenzo 0.
Jan 18: River Plate 1 Racing Club 1.
Jan 20: Boca Juniors 2 Independiente 0.
Jan 23: Independiente 1 San Lorenzo 0.
Jan 24: Boca Juniors 2 River Plate 1.
Jan 27: Boca Juniors 2 Racing Club 0.
Jan 28: River Plate 2 San Lorenzo 2.

ARGENTINA – SUMMER TNMT – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Boca Juniors	4	3	1	0	6	1	10
Independiente	4	2	1	1	6	3	7
Racing Club	4	1	1	2	2	7	4
River Plate	4	0	3	1	5	6	3
San Lorenzo	4	0	2	2	2	4	2

CHILE

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Jan 31: Curico Unido 2 Colo Colo 2; Nublense 2 Audax Italiano 1; Huachipato 0 Univ de Concepcion 1; Everton 0 Union Espanola 1.
Feb 1: Municipal Iquique 0 Univ Catolica 4; Santiago Morning 2 Cobreloa 0; Rangers 1 Dep La Serena 1; Cobresal 1 O'Higgins 1.

CHILE – OPENING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Univ Catolica	1	1	0	0	4	0	3
S Morning	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Nublense	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
U Concepcion	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
U Espanola	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Colo Colo	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Curico Unido	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Cobresal	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Dep La Serena	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
O'Higgins	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Rangers	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Palestino	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Univ de Chile	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Audax Italiano	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Everton	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Huachipato	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Cobreloa	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
M'pal Iquique	1	0	0	1	0	4	0

ECUADOR

CHAMPIONSHIP 1ST STAGE

Jan 31: Manta 0 Barcelona 0.
Feb 1: Macara 1 El Nacional 0; LDU Quito 1 Olmedo 1; Dep Quito 1 Tecnico Univ 1; Emelec 0 LDU P'viejo 1.

ECUADOR – CHAMPIONSHIP 1ST STAGE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
LDU P'viejo	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Macara	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Dep Quito	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
LDU Quito	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Olmedo	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Tecnico Univ	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Barcelona	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Manta	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Dep Cuenca	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Espoli	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
El Nacional	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Emelec	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

URUGUAY

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

URUGUAY – OPENING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Danubio	14	9	2	3	25	14	29
Nacional	14	9	2	3	21	12	29
Racing	14	7	6	1	24	12	27
Defensor	14	8	3	3	22	12	27
Penarol*	14	8	4	2	28	13	25
Liverpool	14	6	6	2	19	14	24
Cerro	14	6	5	3	20	11	23
River Plate	14	5	5	4	16	15	20
C Espanol	14	5	5	4	16	19	20
Tacuarembo	14	4	2	8	12	20	14
Bella Vista	14	4	2	8	12	22	14
Rampla Jrs	14	3	4	7	14	22	13
Villa Espanola	14	3	3	8	11	23	12
Wanderers	14	3	2	9	15	18	11
Cerro Largo	14	1	5	8	11	23	8
Juventud	14	2	2	10	9	25	8

**3pts deducted for incidents during game in previous opening championship*

VENEZUELA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Jan 17: Estrella Roja 1 Dep Tachira 1; Monagas 0 UA Maracaibo 1.
Jan 18: El Vigia 2 Dep Italia 2; Portuguesa 0 Guaros 0; Mineros 2 Estudiantes 2; Caracas 3 Anzoategui 1; Zulia 2 Carabobo 2; Zamora 2 Minerven 2; Aragua 1 Llaneros 2.
Jan 24: Anzoategui 0 Mineros 2.
Jan 25: Dep Tachira 1 Zamora 1; Llaneros 2 Portuguesa 1; Carabobo 1 Estrella Roja 2; Dep Italia 2 Monagas 0; Minerven 1 El Vigia 1; Zulia 2 Caracas 0; Guaros 1 UA Maracaibo 0; Estudiantes 2 Aragua 0.
Jan 28: Guaros 1 Caracas 4.
Jan 31: Monagas 1 Minerven 1.
Feb 1: Zamora 3 Carabobo 0; El Vigia 1 Dep Tachira 0; UA Maracaibo 2 Dep Italia 2; Mineros 1 Zulia 0; Portuguesa 1 Estudiantes 0; Guaros 1 Llaneros 0; Caracas 3 Estrella Roja 2.
Feb 4: Caracas 2 Llaneros 0.
Feb 5: Dep Tachira 1 Monagas 0.

VENEZUELA – CLOSING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Caracas	5	4	0	1	12	6	12
Mineros	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Guaros	4	2	1	1	3	4	7
Llaneros	4	2	0	2	4	5	6
Zamora	3	1	2	0	6	3	5
Dep Italia	3	1	2	0	6	4	5
El Vigia	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
Dep Tachira	4	1	2	1	3	3	5
Estudiantes	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Zulia	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Estrella Roja	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
UA Maracaibo	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Portuguesa	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Minerven	3	0	3	0	4	4	3
Carabobo	3	0	1	2	3	7	1
Monagas	4	0	1	3	1	5	1
Aragua	2	0	0	2	1	4	0
Anzoategui	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

CENTRAL & NORTH AMERICA

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals draw

Cruz Azul (Mex) v Pumas UNAM (Mex)
Houston Dynamo (USA) v Atlante (Mex)
Montreal Impact (Can) v Santos Laguna (Mex)
Puerto Rico Islanders (PR) v Marathon (Hnd)

1st legs - February 24-26; 2nd legs - March 3-5

MEXICO

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Jan 16: Tecos UAG 1 Indios 2.
Jan 17: Monterrey 4 Puebla 0; Jaguares 2 Atlas 1; Morelia 0 San Luis 0; Guadalajara 3 Cruz Azul 3; Necaxa 1 Pumas UNAM 2.
Jan 18: Santos 1 America 2; Toluca 3 Atlante 3; Pachuca 4 Tigres 1.
Jan 24: San Luis 1 Pachuca 2; Cruz Azul 4 Atlas 0; Guadalajara 1 Tecos UAG 0; Tigres 0 Jaguares 3; Atlante 2 Morelia 0.
Jan 25: Puebla 1 Necaxa 0; Pumas UNAM 1 Santos 0; Indios 1 Monterrey 1; America 2 Toluca 2.
Jan 31: Tecos UAG 1 Cruz Azul 0; Jaguares 1 San Luis 2; Monterrey 1 Guadalajara 2; Morelia 1 America 0; Necaxa 2 Indios 2; Atlas 1 Tigres 1.
Feb 1: Pachuca 1 Atlante 1; Toluca 1 Pumas UNAM 0; Santos 0 Puebla 0.

MEXICO – CLOSING – GROUP 1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pachuca	3	2	1	0	7	3	7
Atlante	3	1	2	0	6	4	5
Indios	3	1	2	0	5	4	5
Monterrey	3	1	1	1	6	3	4
Puebla	3	1	1	1	1	4	4
Santos	3	0	1	2	1	3	1

GROUP 2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guadalajara	3	2	1	0	6	4	7
Pumas UNAM	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Cruz Azul	3	1	1	1	7	4	4
America	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Morelia	3	1	1	1	1	2	4
Tecos UAG	3	1	0	2	2	3	3

GROUP 3	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Jaguares	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Toluca	3	1	2	0	6	5	5
San Luis	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Necaxa	3	0	1	2	3	5	1
Atlas	3	0	1	2	2	7	1
Tigres	3	0	1	2	2	8	1

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round

1st legs - January 30-February 1
*Acad. Ny Antsika (Mad) v Stade Tamponnaise (Reu)
Al Ahly Tripoli (Lby) 6 AS Police (Ngr) 0
Al Merreikh (Sud) 2 ATRACO (Rwa) 1
AS Douanes (Sen) 3 Ports Authority (SLe) 1
ASO Chlef (Alg) 1 Fello Star (Gui) 0
Canon Yaounde (Cam) 1 Inter Star (Bdi) 1
DC Motema Pembe (DRC) 1 Mangasport (Gab) 2
Djoliba (Mli) 1 Casa Sport (Sen) 0
Etoile Filante (BuF) 2 Heart of Lions (Gha) 0
FAR Rabat (Mor) 6 Sporting Clube (CVI) 1
Ferroviario (Moz) 2 Kampala City Council (Uga) 1
Heartland (Nig) 4 Black Star (Lbr) 0
Kano Pillars (Nig) 2 Elect Sport (Chd) 0
Monomotapa (Zim) 2 Miembeni (Zan) 0
Petro Atletico (Ang) 3 Royal Leopards (Swa) 0
Primeiro Agosto (Ang) 5 CARA (Con) 2
SuperSport United (SAf) 3 Curepipe Starlight (Mts) 0
Young Africans (Tan) 8 Etoile d'Or (Com) 1
Zesco United (Zam) 2 Mathare United (Ken) 0

2nd legs - February 13-15

**1st leg cancelled because of violence in Madagascar; tie will be settled over a single leg*

Club Africain (Tun) v Sporting Clube (GuB) – Sporting Clube withdrew; Club Africain walkover
IZ Khemisset (Mor) v Wallidan (Gam) – Wallidan withdrew; IZ Khemisset walkover

Byes to 1st round: Africa Sports (IvC), Ajax Cape Town (SAf), Al Ahly (Egy; holders), Al Hilal (Sud), Al Ittihad (Lby), Asante Kotoko (Gha), ASEC Abidjan (IvC), Cotonsport (Cam), Etoile Sahel (Tun), JS Kabylie (Alg), TP Mazembe (DRC)

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round

1st legs - January 31/February 1
AS Adema (Mad) 1 AS Vacoas Phoenix (Mts) 1
Atletico Muculmano (Moz) 1 Malanti Chiefs (Swa) 0
Gor Mahia (Ken) 0 APR (Rwa) 5
Hay Al Arab (Sud) 0 Al Ahly Benghazi (Lby) 1
Mighty Barrolle (Lbr) 0 SO Armee (IvC) 2
OC Bukavu Dawa (DRC) 3 Club 57 Tourbillon (Con) 3
Prisons (Tan) 0 Khaleej Surt (Lby) 2
Red Arrows (Zam) 6 Mundu (Zan) 0
Sport Bissau e Benfica (GuB) 1 ASC Yakaar (Sen) 2
Tourbillon (Chd) 4 Vital'o (Bdi) 0
USM (Gab) 2 AS-FAN (Ngr) 1
USO (BuF) 0 ASC Diaraf (Sen) 0
Victors (Uga) 0 CAPS United (Zim) 2

2nd legs - February 13-15

Byes to 1st round: Aigle Royal (Cam), AS Vita Club (DRC), Bayelsa United (Nig), CS Sfaxien (Tun), EGS Gafsa (Tun), ENPPI (Egy), ES Setif (Alg), Haras Hedood (Egy), Jeunesse Club (IvC), JSM Bejaia (Alg), Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf), MAS Fes (Mor), Ocean Boys (Nig), Recreativo (Ang), Santos (Ang), Satellite (Gui), Stade Malien (Mli), Stade Tunisien (Tun), Union Douala (Cam)

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round draw

Provincial Electricity Authority (Tha) v Armed Forces (Sin)
Single-leg tie (Feb 18). Winners will meet PSMS Medan (Ins) (Feb 25) for group stage place

Al Sharjah (UAE) v Dempo (Ind)
Single-leg tie (Feb 25). Winners enter group stage

Preliminary round losers enter the AFC Cup

Group stage draw

Group A
Al Ahli (UAE)
Al Hilal (Sau)
Pakhtakor (Uzb)
Saba Battery (Irn)

Group B
Al Gharafa (Qat)
Al Shabab (Sau)
Persepolis (Irn)
Al Sharjah OR Dempo

Group C
Al Ittihad (Sau)
Al Jazira (UAE)
Esteghlal (Irn)
Umm Salal (Qat)

Group D
Al Ettifaq (Sau)
Al Shabab (UAE)
Bunyodkor (Uzb)
Sepahan (Irn)

Group E
Beijing Guoan (Chn)
Nagoya Grampus (Jap)
Newcastle Jets (Aus)
Ulsan Hyundai (SKo)

Group F
Gamba Osaka (Jap)
Seoul (SKo)
Shandong Luneng (Chn)
Sriwijaya (Ins)

Group G
Kashima Antlers (Jap)
Shanghai Shenhua (Chn)
Suwon Bluewings (SKo)
Provincial Electricity Authority OR Singapore Armed Forces OR PSMS Medan

Group H
Central Coast Mariners (Aus)
Kawasaki Frontale (Jap)
Pohang Steelers (SKo)
Tianjin Teda (Chn)

Top two in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

Group stage matchdays: Mar 10/11, Mar 17/18, Apr 7/8, Apr 21/22, May 5/6, May 19/20

AFC CUP

Draw

Group A
Al Ahed (Leb)
Al Tilal (Yem)
Busaiteen (Bah)
Neftchi (Uzb)

Group B
Al Hilal (Yem)
Al Suwaiq (Oma)
Al Zawra'a (Irq)
Safa (Leb)

Group C
Al Arabi (Kuw)
Al Mabarrah (Leb)
Al Orouba (Oma)
Arbil (Irq)

Group D
Al Karama (Syr)
Al Wihdat (Jor)
Kuwait SC (Kuw)
Mohun Bagan (Ind)

Group E
Al Faisaly (Jor)
Al Majd (Syr)
Muharraq (Bah)
Losers of the Al Sharjah (UAE) v Dempo (Ind) Champions League preliminary round tie

Group F
Johor (Mly)
South China (HK)
VB (Mdv)
Losers of the Provincial Electricity Authority (Tha) OR Armed Forces (Sin) v PSMS Medan (Ins) Champions League preliminary round tie

Group G
Chonburi (Tha)
Eastern Athletic (HK)
Hanoi ACB (Vie)
Kedah (Mly)

Group H
Binh Duong (Vie)
Home United (Sin)
Valencia (Mdv)
Losers of the Provincial Electricity Authority (Tha) v Armed Forces (Sin) Champions League preliminary round tie

Top two in each group qualify for 1st knockout round

Group stage runs from March 10 to May 19

AUSTRALIA

League stage

Jan 9: Adelaide 2 Newcastle 0.
Jan 10: Central Coast 3 Queensland 4.
Jan 11: Sydney 1 Wellington 0; Perth 3 Melbourne 2.
Jan 14: Adelaide 0 Queensland 0.
Jan 16: Melbourne 3 Central Coast 0.
Jan 17: Queensland 3 Sydney 1.
Jan 18: Wellington 1 Adelaide 1; Newcastle 2 Perth 1.
Jan 23: Melbourne 2 Wellington 0.
Jan 24: Queensland 4 Perth 2.
Jan 25: Sydney 4 Newcastle 0; Central Coast 0 Adelaide 1.

AUSTRALIA – LEAGUE STAGE – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Melbourne	21	12	2	7	39	27	38
Adelaide	21	11	5	5	31	19	38
Queensland	21	10	6	5	36	25	36
Central Coast	21	7	7	7	35	32	28
Sydney	21	7	5	9	33	32	26
Wellington	21	7	5	9	23	31	26
Perth	21	6	4	11	31	44	22
Newcastle	21	4	6	11	21	39	18

Top four qualified for play-offs

OCEANIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A

GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Waitakere (NZ)	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
Auckland	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Port Vila	2	0	0	2	0	5	0

Group B

GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Koloale (Sol)	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Ba	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Hekari Souths	2	0	0	2	2	5	0

Remaining matchdays: Feb 14, Mar 7, Mar 28

FIXTURES

UNITED STATES

Thursday, March 19
Seattle Sounders v New York Red Bulls

Saturday, March 21
Houston Dynamo v Columbus Crew
Dallas v Chicago Fire
Kansas City v Toronto
Chivas USA v Colorado Rapids
San Jose v New England Revs

Sunday, March 22
LA Galaxy v DC United

Saturday, March 28
Columbus Crew v Toronto
DC United v Chicago Fire
New York Red Bulls v New England Revs
Colorado Rapids v Kansas City
San Jose v Houston Dynamo
Seattle Sounders v Real Salt Lake

Sunday, March 29
Dallas v Chivas USA

Thursday, April 2
Real Salt Lake v Columbus Crew

Saturday, April 4
Toronto v Seattle Sounders
New England Revs v Dallas
DC United v Houston Dynamo
Kansas City v San Jose
LA Galaxy v Colorado Rapids

Sunday, April 5
Chicago Fire v New York Red Bulls
Chivas USA v Columbus Crew

Saturday, April 11
Toronto v Dallas
San Jose v Chicago Fire
Real Salt Lake v DC United
Columbus Crew v Colorado Rapids
Houston Dynamo v New York Red Bulls
LA Galaxy v Chivas USA
Seattle Sounders v Kansas City

Friday, April 17
DC United v New England Revs

Saturday, April 18
New York Red Bulls v Real Salt Lake
Chicago Fire v Kansas City
San Jose v LA Galaxy
Chivas USA v Seattle Sounders

Sunday, April 19
Houston Dynamo v Colorado Rapids
Dallas v Toronto

Wednesday, April 22
Toronto v Chivas USA

Thursday, April 23
Kansas City v New York Red Bulls

Saturday, April 25
Columbus Crew v Chicago Fire
Real Salt Lake v New England Revs
Colorado Rapids v LA Galaxy
Chivas USA v Dallas
Seattle Sounders v San Jose

Sunday, April 26
New York Red Bulls v DC United
Toronto v Kansas City

Saturday, May 2
Toronto v Columbus Crew
DC United v Dallas
Chicago Fire v Seattle Sounders
Colorado Rapids v Real Salt Lake
San Jose v Chivas USA
LA Galaxy v New York Red Bulls

Sunday, May 3
New England Revs v Houston Dynamo

Wednesday, May 6
Kansas City v DC United
Real Salt Lake v LA Galaxy

Friday, May 8
New York Red Bulls v San Jose

Saturday, May 9
Columbus Crew v Kansas City
DC United v Toronto
Chicago Fire v New England Revs
Houston Dynamo v Dallas
Chivas USA v Real Salt Lake

Sunday, May 10
Seattle Sounders v LA Galaxy

Saturday, May 16
Toronto v Chicago Fire
New England Revs v Colorado Rapids
New York Red Bulls v Houston Dynamo
Dallas v Seattle Sounders
Real Salt Lake v Kansas City
Chivas USA v DC United

Sunday, May 17
LA Galaxy v Columbus Crew

Saturday, May 23
Toronto v New England Revs
DC United v Real Salt Lake
Kansas City v Chivas USA
Dallas v LA Galaxy
Houston Dynamo v San Jose
Colorado Rapids v Seattle Sounders

Sunday, May 24
New York Red Bulls v Chicago Fire

Wednesday, May 27
Columbus Crew v San Jose

Thursday, May 28
Chivas USA v Chicago Fire

Saturday, May 30
New York Red Bulls v Colorado Rapids
New England Revs v DC United
Houston Dynamo v Toronto
Seattle Sounders v Columbus Crew
LA Galaxy v Kansas City
San Jose v Real Salt Lake

Sunday, May 31
Chicago Fire v Dallas

Thursday, June 4
DC United v New York Red Bulls

Friday, June 5
Chicago Fire v Houston Dynamo

Saturday, June 6
Toronto v LA Galaxy
Kansas City v Columbus Crew
Real Salt Lake v Colorado Rapids
Chivas USA v Seattle Sounders

Sunday, June 7
Dallas v San Jose
New England Revs v New York Red Bulls

Wednesday, June 10
Houston Dynamo v Chivas USA

Saturday, June 13
DC United v Chicago Fire
Dallas v Houston Dynamo
Kansas City v New England Revs
LA Galaxy v Real Salt Lake
Seattle Sounders v San Jose

Sunday, June 14
Columbus Crew v Chivas USA

Wednesday, June 17
Seattle Sounders v DC United

Saturday, June 20
San Jose v LA Galaxy
New York Red Bulls v Seattle Sounders
Dallas v Columbus Crew
Houston Dynamo v Real Salt Lake
Colorado Rapids v DC United

Wednesday, June 24
Toronto v New York Red Bulls
Colorado Rapids v Dallas

Saturday, June 27
Columbus Crew v New York Red Bulls
Real Salt Lake v Toronto

Sunday, June 28
Seattle Sounders v Colorado Rapids
LA Galaxy v Houston Dynamo

Saturday, July 4
Columbus Crew v DC United
Colorado Rapids v Chicago Fire
Kansas City v Houston Dynamo
Dallas v New York Red Bulls
Real Salt Lake v San Jose
LA Galaxy v New England Revs

Saturday, July 11
New England Revs v Kansas City
Seattle Sounders v Houston Dynamo
Chicago Fire v Columbus Crew
Colorado Rapids v Dallas
Chivas USA v LA Galaxy
San Jose v Toronto

Saturday, July 18
Toronto v Houston Dynamo
New York Red Bulls v LA Galaxy
DC United v Colorado Rapids
Columbus Crew v Real Salt Lake
Chicago Fire v San Jose

Sunday, July 19
New England Revs v Chivas USA

Friday, July 24
Real Salt Lake v Dallas

Saturday, July 25
Seattle Sounders v Chicago Fire
Columbus Crew v Toronto
Kansas City v LA Galaxy
Houston Dynamo v New England Revs
Colorado Rapids v New York Red Bulls
San Jose v DC United

Saturday, August 1
New England Revs v Toronto
Houston Dynamo v DC United
Dallas v Kansas City
Chicago Fire v Real Salt Lake
Colorado Rapids v Columbus Crew

Sunday, August 2
San Jose v Seattle Sounders

Thursday, August 6
Dallas v Houston Dynamo

Saturday, August 8
New England Revs v LA Galaxy
DC United v Kansas City
Real Salt Lake v Seattle Sounders
Colorado Rapids v Chivas USA
San Jose v Columbus Crew

Sunday, August 9
Toronto v New York Red Bulls
Houston Dynamo v Chicago Fire

Saturday, August 15
Toronto v DC United
New York Red Bulls v Chivas USA
Columbus Crew v Dallas
Real Salt Lake v Houston Dynamo
LA Galaxy v Seattle Sounders

Sunday, August 16
Kansas City v Chicago Fire

Wednesday, August 19
Chicago Fire v LA Galaxy

Thursday, August 20
Seattle Sounders v New England Revs

Saturday, August 22
DC United v LA Galaxy
San Jose v Kansas City
Chivas USA v Toronto

Sunday, August 23
New York Red Bulls v Dallas
Chicago Fire v Colorado Rapids
New England Revs v Real Salt Lake
Houston Dynamo v Seattle Sounders

Wednesday, August 26
Real Salt Lake v Chivas USA

Saturday, August 29
Seattle Sounders v Toronto
New England Revs v San Jose
Chicago Fire v DC United
Kansas City v Real Salt Lake
LA Galaxy v Chivas USA

Sunday, August 30
Colorado Rapids v Houston Dynamo
New York Red Bulls v Columbus Crew

Saturday, September 5
New England Revs v Kansas City
Dallas v DC United
Colorado Rapids v Toronto

Saturday, September 12
Toronto v Colorado Rapids
New York Red Bulls v Kansas City
DC United v Seattle Sounders
Real Salt Lake v Chicago Fire
LA Galaxy v Dallas

Sunday, September 13
Chivas USA v New England Revs
Columbus Crew v Houston Dynamo

Friday, September 18
New York Red Bulls v New England Revs
San Jose v Colorado Rapids

Saturday, September 19
Seattle Sounders v Chivas USA
Kansas City v Dallas
Houston Dynamo v Real Salt Lake
LA Galaxy v Toronto

Sunday, September 20
Chicago Fire v Columbus Crew

Wednesday, September 23
Colorado Rapids v San Jose

Saturday, September 26
Columbus Crew v LA Galaxy
New England Revs v Seattle Sounders
Kansas City v Colorado Rapids
Dallas v Real Salt Lake
Chicago Fire v Toronto
Chivas USA v New York Red Bulls

Sunday, September 27
DC United v San Jose

Wednesday, September 30
Dallas v New England Revs

Friday, October 2
LA Galaxy v Chicago Fire

Saturday, October 3
DC United v Chivas USA
Columbus Crew v Seattle Sounders
Colorado Rapids v New England Revs
San Jose v New York Red Bulls

Sunday, October 4
Houston Dynamo v Kansas City

Wednesday, October 7
San Jose v Dallas

Saturday, October 10
Toronto v San Jose
New England Revs v Columbus Crew
Chivas USA v Kansas City

Wednesday, October 14
Real Salt Lake v New York Red Bulls

Saturday, October 17
Toronto v Real Salt Lake
New England Revs v Chicago Fire
DC United v Columbus Crew
Dallas v Colorado Rapids
Kansas City v Seattle Sounders
Chivas USA v San Jose

Sunday, October 18
Houston Dynamo v LA Galaxy

Thursday, October 22
Chicago Fire v Chivas USA

Saturday, October 24
New York Red Bulls v Toronto
Kansas City v DC United
Real Salt Lake v Colorado Rapids
Seattle Sounders v Dallas
LA Galaxy v San Jose

Sunday, October 25
Chivas USA v Houston Dynamo
Columbus Crew v New England Revs

WORLD CUP QUALIFYING GUIDE

AFRICA

6 finals berths (one of which goes automatically to hosts South Africa)

1st stage

The 10 lowest-ranked countries of the 53 entrants were drawn in five two-leg ties. However, the Central African Republic and Sao Tome e Principe, who had been drawn together, both withdrew. FIFA awarded byes to the two highest-ranked countries of the remaining eight – Swaziland and Seychelles – and reordered the draw. The winners advanced to the 2nd stage.

Djibouti v Somalia* 1-0
Madagascar v Comoros Islands 6-2, 4-0 (agg 10-2)
Sierra Leone v Guinea-Bissau 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)

1st legs - 14/17.10.07; 2nd legs - 17.11.07

**Decided on a single match, in Djibouti, 16.11.07*

2nd stage

The 48 countries** played in 12 round-robin groups, from which the winners and the best eight runners-up*** advanced to the 3rd stage.

***South Africa participated despite having a finals berth guaranteed because the World Cup qualifying campaign doubles as the qualifying campaign for the 2010 African Nations Cup.*
****The runners-up were ranked according to the number of points gained against the teams finishing first and third in their respective groups.*

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cameroon	6	5	1	0	14	2	16
Cape Verde Is	6	3	0	3	7	8	9
Tanzania	6	2	2	2	9	6	8
Mauritius	6	0	1	5	3	17	1

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Guinea	6	3	2	1	9	5	11
Kenya+	6	3	1	2	8	5	10
Zimbabwe	6	1	3	2	4	6	6
Namibia	6	2	0	4	7	12	6

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Benin	6	4	0	2	12	8	12
Angola	6	3	1	2	11	8	10
Uganda	6	3	1	2	8	9	10
Niger	6	1	0	5	5	11	3

Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	6	6	0	0	11	1	18
South Africa	6	2	1	3	5	5	7
Sierra Leone	6	2	1	3	4	8	7
Equat Guinea	6	1	0	5	4	10	3

Group 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana	6	4	0	2	11	5	12
Gabon+	6	4	0	2	8	3	12
Libya	6	4	0	2	7	4	12
Lesotho	6	0	0	6	2	16	0

Group 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria	6	3	1	2	7	4	10
Gambia	6	2	3	1	6	3	9
Senegal	6	2	3	1	9	7	9
Liberia	6	0	3	3	4	12	3

Group 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	6	3	3	0	10	2	12
Mozambique+	6	2	2	2	7	5	8
Madagascar	6	1	3	2	2	7	6
Botswana	6	1	2	3	3	8	5

Group 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morocco	4	3	0	1	11	5	9
Rwanda+	4	3	0	1	7	3	9
Mauritania	4	0	0	4	2	12	0

Ethiopia excluded because of their federation's non-compliance with a FIFA "roadmap"

Group 9

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Burkina Faso	6	5	1	0	14	5	16
Tunisia+	6	4	1	1	11	3	13
Burundi	6	2	0	4	5	9	6
Seychelles	6	0	0	6	4	17	0

Group 10

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mali	6	4	0	2	13	8	12
Sudan+	6	3	0	3	9	9	9
Congo	6	3	0	3	7	8	9
Chad	6	2	0	4	7	11	6

Group 11

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zambia	4	2	1	1	2	1	7
Togo+	4	2	0	2	8	3	6
Swaziland	4	1	1	2	2	8	4

Eritrea withdrew

Group 12

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Egypt	6	5	0	1	13	2	15
Malawi+	6	4	0	2	14	5	12
DR Congo	6	3	0	3	14	6	9
Djibouti	6	0	0	6	2	30	0

+ Qualified as one of the best eight runners-up

3rd stage

The 20 countries have been drawn in five round-robin groups, the winners of which will qualify for the finals.

Group A

Cameroon
Gabon
Morocco
Togo

28.03.09 Morocco-Gabon
28.03.09 Togo-Cameroon
06.06.09 Cameroon-Morocco
06.06.09 Gabon-Togo
20.06.09 Gabon-Cameroon
20.06.09 Morocco-Togo
05.09.09 Cameroon-Gabon
05.09.09 Togo-Morocco
10.10.09 Cameroon-Togo
10.10.09 Gabon-Morocco
14.11.09 Morocco-Cameroon
14.11.09 Togo-Gabon

Group B

Kenya
Mozambique
Nigeria
Tunisia

28.03.09 Kenya-Tunisia
29.03.09 Mozambique-Nigeria
06.06.09 Nigeria-Kenya
06.06.09 Tunisia-Mozambique
20.06.09 Kenya-Mozambique
20.06.09 Tunisia-Nigeria
05.09.09 Mozambique-Kenya
05.09.09 Nigeria-Tunisia
10.10.09 Nigeria-Mozambique
10.10.09 Tunisia-Kenya
14.11.09 Kenya-Nigeria
14.11.09 Mozambique-Tunisia

Group C

Algeria
Egypt
Rwanda
Zambia

28.03.09 Rwanda-Algeria
29.03.09 Egypt-Zambia
06.06.09 Algeria-Egypt
06.06.09 Zambia-Rwanda
10.06.09 Egypt-Rwanda
20.06.09 Zambia-Algeria
05.09.09 Algeria-Zambia
05.09.09 Rwanda-Egypt
10.10.09 Algeria-Rwanda
10.10.09 Zambia-Egypt
14.11.09 Egypt-Algeria
14.11.09 Rwanda-Zambia

Group D

Benin
Ghana
Mali
Sudan

28.03.09 Sudan-Mali
29.03.09 Ghana-Benin
06.06.09 Benin-Sudan
06.06.09 Mali-Ghana
20.06.09 Mali-Benin
20.06.09 Sudan-Ghana
05.09.09 Benin-Mali
05.09.09 Ghana-Sudan
10.10.09 Benin-Ghana
10.10.09 Mali-Sudan
14.11.09 Ghana-Mali
14.11.09 Sudan-Benin

Group E

Burkina Faso
Guinea
Ivory Coast
Malawi

28.03.09 Burkina Faso-Guinea
29.03.09 Ivory Coast-Malawi
06.06.09 Guinea-Ivory Coast
06.06.09 Malawi-Burkina Faso
20.06.09 Burkina Faso-Ivory Coast
20.06.09 Guinea-Malawi
05.09.09 Ivory Coast-Burkina Faso
05.09.09 Malawi-Guinea
10.10.09 Guinea-Burkina Faso
10.10.09 Malawi-Ivory Coast
14.11.09 Burkina Faso-Malawi
14.11.09 Ivory Coast-Guinea

ASIA

4.5 finals berths

1st stage

The 38 lowest-ranked countries of the 43 entrants were drawn in 19 two-leg ties. The eight lowest-ranked winners entered the 2nd stage; the other 11 winners went straight into the 3rd stage, to which Asia's top five seeds – Australia, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Japan and Iran – received a bye.

Bahrain v Malaysia 4-1, 0-0 (agg 4-1)
Bangladesh v Tajikistan 1-1, 0-5 (agg 1-6)
*Bhutan v Kuwait
Cambodia v Turkmenistan 0-1, 1-4 (agg 1-5)
China v Myanmar 7-0, 4-0 (agg 11-0)
East Timor v Hong Kong 2-3, 1-8 (agg 3-11)
**Guam v Indonesia
Kyrgyzstan v Jordan 2-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 2-2; Jordan 6-5 on pens)
Lebanon v India 4-1, 2-2 (agg 6-3)
Mongolia v North Korea 1-4, 1-5 (agg 2-9)
Oman v Nepal 2-0, 2-0 (agg 4-0)
Pakistan v Iraq 0-7, 0-0 (agg 0-7)
Palestine v Singapore 0-4, 0-3 (awarded) (agg 0-7)
Sri Lanka v Qatar 0-1, 0-5 (agg 0-6)
Syria v Afghanistan 3-0, 2-1 (agg 5-1)
Thailand v Macao 6-1, 7-1 (agg 13-2)
Uzbekistan v Taiwan 9-0, 2-0 (agg 11-0)
Vietnam v United Arab Emirates 0-1, 0-5 (agg 0-6)
Yemen v Maldives 3-0, 0-2 (agg 3-2)

1st legs - 08-22.10.07; 2nd legs - 15-30.10.07

**Bhutan withdrew; Kuwait were given a bye*
***Guam withdrew; Indonesia were given a bye*

2nd stage

The eight lowest-ranked 1st stage winners were drawn in four two-leg ties, the winners of which advanced to the 3rd stage.

Hong Kong v Turkmenistan 0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3)
Indonesia v Syria 1-4, 0-7 (agg 1-11)
Singapore v Tajikistan 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)
Yemen v Thailand 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)

1st legs - 09/10.11.07; 2nd legs - 18.11.07

3rd stage

The 20 countries played in five round-robin groups. The group winners and runners-up advanced to the 4th stage.

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia	6	3	1	2	7	3	10
Qatar	6	3	1	2	5	6	10
Iraq	6	2	1	3	4	6	7
China	6	1	3	2	3	4	6

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Japan	6	4	1	1	12	3	13
Bahrain	6	3	2	1	7	5	11
Oman	6	2	2	2	5	7	8
Thailand	6	0	1	5	5	14	1

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	6	3	3	0	10	3	12
North Korea	6	3	3	0	4	0	12
Jordan	6	2	1	3	6	6	7
Turkmenistan	6	0	1	5	1	12	1

Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Saudi Arabia	6	5	0	1	14	5	15
Uzbekistan	6	5	0	1	15	7	15
Singapore	6	2	0	4	7	13	6
Lebanon	6	0	0	6	3	14	0

Group 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iran	6	3	3	0	7	2	12
UAE	6	2	2	2	7	7	8
Syria	6	2	2	2	7	8	8
Kuwait	6	1	1	4	8	12	4

4th stage

The 10 countries are playing in two round-robin groups, from which the winners and runners-up will qualify for the finals. The two third-placed countries will meet in a two-leg play-off, the winners of which will meet the Oceania section winners in a two-leg tie for a place in the finals.

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia	3	3	0	0	6	0	9
Japan	3	2	1	0	7	3	7
Qatar	4	1	1	2	4	8	4
Bahrain	3	0	1	2	3	5	1
Uzbekistan	3	0	1	2	1	5	1

06.09.08 Bahrain-Japan 2-3
06.09.08 Qatar-Uzbekistan 3-0
10.09.08 Qatar-Bahrain 1-1
10.09.08 Uzbekistan-Australia 0-1
15.10.08 Australia-Qatar 4-0
15.10.08 Japan-Uzbekistan 1-1
19.11.08 Bahrain-Australia 0-1
19.11.08 Qatar-Japan 0-3
11.02.09 Japan-Australia
11.02.09 Uzbekistan-Bahrain
28.03.09 Japan-Bahrain
28.03.09 Uzbekistan-Qatar
01.04.09 Australia-Uzbekistan
01.04.09 Bahrain-Qatar
06.06.09 Qatar-Australia
06.06.09 Uzbekistan-Japan
10.06.09 Australia-Bahrain
10.06.09 Japan-Qatar
17.06.09 Australia-Japan
17.06.09 Bahrain-Uzbekistan

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea	3	2	1	0	7	2	7
Iran	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
North Korea	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Saudi Arabia	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
UAE	4	0	1	3	4	9	1

06.09.08 Saudi Arabia-Iran 1-1
06.09.08 UAE-North Korea 1-2
10.09.08 North Korea-South Korea 1-1
10.09.08 UAE-Saudi Arabia 1-2
15.10.08 Iran-North Korea 2-1
15.10.08 South Korea-UAE 4-1
19.11.08 Saudi Arabia-South Korea 0-2
19.11.08 UAE-Iran 1-1
11.02.09 Iran-South Korea
11.02.09 North Korea-Saudi Arabia
28.03.09 Iran-Saudi Arabia
28.03.09 North Korea-UAE
01.04.09 Saudi Arabia-UAE
01.04.09 South Korea-North Korea
06.06.09 North Korea-Iran
06.06.09 UAE-South Korea
10.06.09 Iran-UAE
10.06.09 South Korea-Saudi Arabia
17.06.09 Saudi Arabia-North Korea
17.06.09 South Korea-Iran

CONCACAF

3.5 finals berths

1st stage

The 22 lowest-ranked countries of the 35 entrants were drawn in 11 two-leg ties, however three of the games – Dominican Republic v Puerto Rico, Surinam v Montserrat and US Virgin Islands v Grenada – were then made single-leg ties only, because several of those countries did not have a stadium that met FIFA criteria. The winners advanced to the 2nd stage, to which the 13 highest-ranked countries received a bye.

Aruba v Antigua & Barbuda 0-3, 0-1 (agg 0-4)
Bahamas v British Virgin Islands 1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3; Bahamas on away goals)
Belize v St Kitts & Nevis 3-1, 1-1 (agg 4-2)
Bermuda v Cayman Islands 1-1, 3-1 (agg 4-2)
Dominica v Barbados 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
El Salvador v Anguilla 12-0, 4-0 (agg 16-0)
Grenada v US Virgin Islands* 10-0
Montserrat v Surinam* 1-7
Nicaragua v Dutch Antilles 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3)
Puerto Rico v Dominican Republic* 1-0 (aet)
Turks & Caicos Islands v St Lucia 2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)

1st legs - 03/06.02.08 & 26.03.08; 2nd legs - 26-30.03.08

**Single-leg games - 26.03.08*

2nd stage

The 24 countries were drawn in 12 two-leg ties, the winners of which advanced to the 3rd stage.

Antigua & Barbuda v Cuba 3-4, 0-4 (agg 3-8)
Belize v Mexico 0-2, 0-7 (agg 0-9)
Grenada v Costa Rica 2-2, 0-3 (agg 2-5)
Guatemala v St Lucia 6-0, 3-1 (agg 9-1)
Haiti v Dutch Antilles 0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0)
Honduras v Puerto Rico 4-0, 2-2 (agg 6-2)
Jamaica v Bahamas 7-0, 6-0 (agg 13-0)
Panama v El Salvador 1-0, 1-3 (agg 2-3)
St Vincent & The Grenadines v Canada 0-3, 1-4 (agg 1-7)
Surinam v Guyana 1-0, 2-1 (agg 3-1)
Trinidad & Tobago v Bermuda 1-2, 2-0 (agg 3-2)
United States v Barbados 8-0, 1-0 (agg 9-0)

1st legs - 4-17.06.08; 2nd legs - 14-22.06.08

3rd stage

The 12 countries played in three round-robin groups, from which the winners and runners-up advanced to the 4th stage.

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
United States	6	5	0	1	14	3	15
Trinidad & Tob	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
Guatemala	6	1	2	3	6	7	5
Cuba	6	1	0	5	5	18	3

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Honduras	6	4	0	2	9	5	12
Mexico	6	3	1	2	9	6	10
Jamaica	6	3	1	2	6	6	10
Canada	6	0	2	4	6	13	2

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Costa Rica	6	6	0	0	20	3	18
El Salvador	6	3	1	2	11	4	10
Haiti	6	0	3	3	4	13	3
Surinam	6	0	2	4	4	19	2

4th stage

The six countries will play in a single round-robin group. The top three will qualify for the finals. The fourth-placed country will meet the fifth-placed South American country in a two-leg tie for a place in the finals.

11.02.09 Costa Rica-Honduras
11.02.09 El Salvador-Trinidad & Tob
11.02.09 United States-Mexico
28.03.09 El Salvador-United States
28.03.09 Mexico-Costa Rica
28.03.09 Trinidad & Tob-Honduras
01.04.09 Costa Rica-El Salvador
01.04.09 Honduras-Mexico
01.04.09 United States-Trinidad & Tob
03.06.09 Costa Rica-United States
06.06.09 El Salvador-Mexico
06.06.09 Trinidad & Tob-Costa Rica
06.06.09 United States-Honduras
10.06.09 Honduras-El Salvador
10.06.09 Mexico-Trinidad & Tob
12.08.09 Honduras-Costa Rica
12.08.09 Mexico-United States
12.08.09 Trinidad & Tob-El Salvador
05.09.09 Costa Rica-Mexico
05.09.09 Honduras-Trinidad & Tob
05.09.09 United States-El Salvador
09.09.09 El Salvador-Costa Rica
09.09.09 Mexico-Honduras
09.09.09 Trinidad & Tob-United States
10.10.09 Costa Rica-Trinidad & Tob
10.10.09 Honduras-United States
10.10.09 Mexico-El Salvador
14.10.09 El Salvador-Honduras
14.10.09 Trinidad & Tob-Mexico
14.10.09 United States-Costa Rica

EUROPE

13 finals berths

The 53 countries are playing in nine round-robin groups, the winners of which will qualify for the finals. The best eight runners-up* will be drawn in four two-leg play-off ties, the winners of which will also qualify for the finals.

**The runners-up will be ranked according to the number of points gained against the teams finishing first, third, fourth and fifth in their respective groups.*

Group 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
Hungary	4	2	1	1	4	2	7
Portugal	4	1	2	1	6	3	5
Albania	4	1	2	1	3	2	5
Sweden	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Malta	4	0	0	4	0	11	0

06.09.08 Albania-Sweden 0-0
06.09.08 Hungary-Denmark 0-0
06.09.08 Malta-Portugal 0-4
10.09.08 Albania-Malta 3-0
10.09.08 Portugal-Denmark 2-3
10.09.08 Sweden-Hungary 2-1
11.10.08 Denmark-Malta 3-0
11.10.08 Hungary-Albania 2-0
11.10.08 Sweden-Portugal 0-0
15.10.08 Malta-Hungary 0-1
15.10.08 Portugal-Albania 0-0
11.02.09 Malta-Albania
28.03.09 Albania-Hungary
28.03.09 Malta-Denmark
28.03.09 Portugal-Sweden
01.04.09 Denmark-Albania
01.04.09 Hungary-Malta
06.06.09 Albania-Portugal
06.06.09 Sweden-Denmark
10.06.09 Sweden-Malta
05.09.09 Denmark-Portugal
05.09.09 Hungary-Sweden
09.09.09 Albania-Denmark
09.09.09 Hungary-Portugal
09.09.09 Malta-Sweden
10.10.09 Denmark-Sweden
10.10.09 Portugal-Hungary
14.10.09 Denmark-Hungary
14.10.09 Portugal-Malta
14.10.09 Sweden-Albania

Group 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Greece	4	3	0	1	9	2	9
Israel	4	2	2	0	8	5	8
Switzerland	4	2	1	1	7	6	7
Latvia	4	1	1	2	4	6	4
Luxembourg	4	1	1	2	3	7	4
Moldova	4	0	1	3	2	7	1

06.09.08 Israel-Switzerland 2-2
06.09.08 Luxembourg-Greece 0-3
06.09.08 Moldova-Latvia 1-2
10.09.08 Latvia-Greece 0-2
10.09.08 Moldova-Israel 1-2
10.09.08 Switzerland-Luxembourg 1-2
11.10.08 Greece-Moldova 3-0
11.10.08 Luxembourg-Israel 1-3
11.10.08 Switzerland-Latvia 2-1
15.10.08 Greece-Switzerland 1-2
15.10.08 Latvia-Israel 1-1
15.10.08 Luxembourg-Moldova 0-0
28.03.09 Israel-Greece
28.03.09 Luxembourg-Latvia
28.03.09 Moldova-Switzerland
01.04.09 Greece-Israel
01.04.09 Latvia-Luxembourg
01.04.09 Switzerland-Moldova
05.09.09 Israel-Latvia
05.09.09 Moldova-Luxembourg
05.09.09 Switzerland-Greece
09.09.09 Israel-Luxembourg
09.09.09 Latvia-Switzerland
09.09.09 Moldova-Greece
10.10.09 Greece-Latvia
10.10.09 Israel-Moldova
10.10.09 Luxembourg-Switzerland
14.10.09 Greece-Luxembourg
14.10.09 Latvia-Moldova
14.10.09 Switzerland-Israel

Group 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovakia	4	3	0	1	8	5	9
Czech Rep	4	2	1	1	5	2	7
Poland	4	2	1	1	6	4	7
Slovenia	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
N Ireland	4	1	1	2	5	4	4
San Marino	4	0	0	4	1	12	0

06.09.08 Poland-Slovenia 1-1
06.09.08 Slovakia-Northern Ireland 2-1
10.09.08 Northern Ireland-Czech Rep 0-0
10.09.08 San Marino-Poland 0-2
10.09.08 Slovenia-Slovakia 2-1
11.10.08 Poland-Czech Rep 2-1
11.10.08 San Marino-Slovakia 1-3
11.10.08 Slovenia-Northern Ireland 2-0
15.10.08 Czech Rep-Slovenia 1-0
15.10.08 Northern Ireland-San Marino 4-0
15.10.08 Slovakia-Poland 2-1
19.11.08 San Marino-Czech Rep 0-3
11.02.09 San Marino-Northern Ireland
28.03.09 Northern Ireland-Poland
28.03.09 Slovenia-Czech Rep
01.04.09 Czech Rep-Slovakia
01.04.09 Northern Ireland-Slovenia
01.04.09 Poland-San Marino
06.06.09 Slovakia-San Marino
12.08.09 Slovenia-San Marino
05.09.09 Poland-Northern Ireland
05.09.09 Slovakia-Czech Rep
09.09.09 Czech Rep-San Marino
09.09.09 Northern Ireland-Slovakia
09.09.09 Slovenia-Poland
10.10.09 Czech Rep-Poland
10.10.09 Slovakia-Slovenia
14.10.09 Czech Rep-Northern Ireland
14.10.09 Poland-Slovakia
14.10.09 San Marino-Slovenia

Group 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	4	3	1	0	12	4	10
Russia	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Wales	4	2	0	2	4	3	6
Finland	3	1	1	1	4	6	4
Azerbaijan	3	0	1	2	0	2	1
Liechtenstein	3	0	1	2	0	8	1

06.09.08 Liechtenstein-Germany 0-6
06.09.08 Wales-Azerbaijan 1-0
10.09.08 Azerbaijan-Liechtenstein 0-0
10.09.08 Finland-Germany 3-3
10.09.08 Russia-Wales 2-1
11.10.08 Finland-Azerbaijan 1-0
11.10.08 Germany-Russia 2-1
11.10.08 Wales-Liechtenstein 2-0
15.10.08 Germany-Wales 1-0
15.10.08 Russia-Finland 3-0
28.03.09 Germany-Liechtenstein
28.03.09 Russia-Azerbaijan
28.03.09 Wales-Finland
01.04.09 Liechtenstein-Russia
01.04.09 Wales-Germany
06.06.09 Azerbaijan-Wales
06.06.09 Finland-Liechtenstein
10.06.09 Finland-Russia
12.08.09 Azerbaijan-Germany
05.09.09 Azerbaijan-Finland
05.09.09 Russia-Liechtenstein
09.09.09 Germany-Azerbaijan

09.09.09 Liechtenstein-Finland
09.09.09 Wales-Russia
10.10.09 Finland-Wales
10.10.09 Liechtenstein-Azerbaijan
10.10.09 Russia-Germany
14.10.09 Azerbaijan-Russia
14.10.09 Germany-Finland
14.10.09 Liechtenstein-Wales

Group 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	4	4	0	0	10	1	12
Turkey	4	2	2	0	5	2	8
Belgium	4	2	1	1	7	5	7
Bosnia-Herz	4	2	0	2	12	4	6
Estonia	4	0	1	3	2	13	1
Armenia	4	0	0	4	1	12	0

06.09.08 Armenia-Turkey 0-2
06.09.08 Belgium-Estonia 3-2
06.09.08 Spain-Bosnia-Herzegovina 1-0
10.09.08 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Estonia ... 7-0
10.09.08 Spain-Armenia 4-0
10.09.08 Turkey-Belgium 1-1
11.10.08 Belgium-Armenia 2-0
11.10.08 Estonia-Spain 0-3
11.10.08 Turkey-Bosnia-Herzegovina 2-1
15.10.08 Belgium-Spain 1-2
15.10.08 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Armenia .. 4-1
15.10.08 Estonia-Turkey 0-0
28.03.09 Armenia-Estonia
28.03.09 Belgium-Bosnia-Herzegovina
28.03.09 Spain-Turkey
01.04.09 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Belgium
01.04.09 Estonia-Armenia
01.04.09 Turkey-Spain
05.09.09 Armenia-Bosnia-Herzegovina
05.09.09 Spain-Belgium
05.09.09 Turkey-Estonia
09.09.09 Armenia-Belgium
09.09.09 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Turkey
09.09.09 Spain-Estonia
10.10.09 Armenia-Spain
10.10.09 Belgium-Turkey
10.10.09 Estonia-Bosnia-Herzegovina
14.10.09 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Spain
14.10.09 Estonia-Belgium
14.10.09 Turkey-Armenia

Group 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	4	4	0	0	14	3	12
Croatia	4	2	1	1	8	4	7
Ukraine	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Belarus	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
Kazakhstan	4	1	0	3	5	11	3
Andorra	4	0	0	4	1	12	0

20.08.08 Kazakhstan-Andorra 3-0
06.09.08 Andorra-England 0-2
06.09.08 Croatia-Kazakhstan 3-0
06.09.08 Ukraine-Belarus 1-0
10.09.08 Andorra-Belarus 1-3
10.09.08 Croatia-England 1-4
10.09.08 Kazakhstan-Ukraine 1-3
11.10.08 England-Kazakhstan 5-1
11.10.08 Ukraine-Croatia 0-0
15.10.08 Belarus-England 1-3
15.10.08 Croatia-Andorra 4-0
01.04.09 Andorra-Croatia
01.04.09 England-Ukraine
01.04.09 Kazakhstan-Belarus
06.06.09 Belarus-Andorra
06.06.09 Croatia-Ukraine
06.06.09 Kazakhstan-England
10.06.09 England-Andorra
10.06.09 Ukraine-Kazakhstan
12.08.09 Belarus-Croatia
05.09.09 Croatia-Belarus
05.09.09 Ukraine-Andorra
09.09.09 Andorra-Kazakhstan
09.09.09 Belarus-Ukraine
09.09.09 England-Croatia
10.10.09 Belarus-Kazakhstan
10.10.09 Ukraine-England
14.10.09 Andorra-Ukraine
14.10.09 England-Belarus
14.10.09 Kazakhstan-Croatia

Group 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Serbia	4	3	0	1	9	3	9
Lithuania	4	3	0	1	6	3	9
France	3	1	1	1	5	6	4
Austria	4	1	1	2	5	7	4
Romania	3	1	1	1	3	5	4
Faroe Islands	4	0	1	3	1	5	1

06.09.08 Austria-France 3-1
06.09.08 Romania-Lithuania 0-3
06.09.08 Serbia-Faroe Islands 2-0
10.09.08 Faroe Islands-Romania 0-1
10.09.08 France-Serbia 2-1
10.09.08 Lithuania-Austria 2-0
11.10.08 Faroe Islands-Austria 1-1
11.10.08 Romania-France 2-2
11.10.08 Serbia-Lithuania 3-0
15.10.08 Austria-Serbia 1-3
15.10.08 Lithuania-Faroe Islands 1-0
28.03.09 Lithuania-France
28.03.09 Romania-Serbia
01.04.09 Austria-Romania
01.04.09 France-Lithuania
06.06.09 Lithuania-Romania
06.06.09 Serbia-Austria
10.06.09 Faroe Islands-Serbia
12.08.09 Faroe Islands-France
05.09.09 Austria-Faroe Islands
05.09.09 France-Romania
09.09.09 Faroe Islands-Lithuania
09.09.09 Romania-Austria
09.09.09 Serbia-France
10.10.09 Austria-Lithuania
10.10.09 France-Faroe Islands
10.10.09 Serbia-Romania
14.10.09 France-Austria
14.10.09 Lithuania-Serbia
14.10.09 Romania-Faroe Islands

Group 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	4	3	1	0	6	2	10
Rep Ireland	3	2	1	0	3	1	7
Bulgaria	3	0	3	0	2	2	3
Montenegro	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Georgia	4	0	2	2	2	5	2
Cyprus	3	0	1	2	2	4	1

06.09.08 Cyprus-Italy 1-2
06.09.08 Georgia-Rep Ireland 1-2
06.09.08 Montenegro-Bulgaria 2-2
10.09.08 Italy-Georgia 2-0
10.09.08 Montenegro-Rep Ireland 0-0
11.10.08 Bulgaria-Italy 0-0
11.10.08 Georgia-Cyprus 1-1
15.10.08 Georgia-Bulgaria 0-0
15.10.08 Italy-Montenegro 2-1
15.10.08 Rep Ireland-Cyprus 1-0
11.02.09 Rep Ireland-Georgia
28.03.09 Cyprus-Georgia
28.03.09 Montenegro-Italy
28.03.09 Rep Ireland-Bulgaria
01.04.09 Bulgaria-Cyprus
01.04.09 Georgia-Montenegro
01.04.09 Italy-Rep Ireland
06.06.09 Bulgaria-Rep Ireland
06.06.09 Cyprus-Montenegro
05.09.09 Bulgaria-Montenegro
05.09.09 Cyprus-Rep Ireland
05.09.09 Georgia-Italy
09.09.09 Italy-Bulgaria
09.09.09 Montenegro-Cyprus
10.10.09 Cyprus-Bulgaria
10.10.09 Montenegro-Georgia
10.10.09 Rep Ireland-Italy
14.10.09 Bulgaria-Georgia
14.10.09 Italy-Cyprus
14.10.09 Rep Ireland-Montenegro

Group 9

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	3	3	0	0	5	1	9
Scotland	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Iceland	4	1	1	2	4	6	4
Macedonia	3	1	0	2	2	3	3
Norway	3	0	2	1	2	3	2

06.09.08 Macedonia-Scotland 1-0
06.09.08 Norway-Iceland 2-2
10.09.08 Iceland-Scotland 1-2
10.09.08 Macedonia-Holland 1-2
11.10.08 Holland-Iceland 2-0
11.10.08 Scotland-Norway 0-0
15.10.08 Iceland-Macedonia 1-0
15.10.08 Norway-Holland 0-1
28.03.09 Holland-Scotland
01.04.09 Holland-Macedonia
01.04.09 Scotland-Iceland
06.06.09 Iceland-Holland
06.06.09 Macedonia-Norway
10.06.09 Holland-Norway
10.06.09 Macedonia-Iceland
12.08.09 Norway-Scotland
05.09.09 Iceland-Norway
05.09.09 Scotland-Macedonia
09.09.09 Norway-Macedonia
09.09.09 Scotland-Holland

OCEANIA

0.5 finals berths

1st stage

The nine-lowest ranked countries of the 10 entrants* played a preliminary qualifying competition. The countries finishing first, second and third advanced to the 2nd stage, to which New Zealand, Oceania's highest-ranked country, received a bye.

Played in Apia, Samoa

Group A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fiji	4	3	1	0	25	1	10
New Caledonia	4	3	1	0	6	1	10
Tahiti	4	1	1	2	2	6	4
Cook Islands	4	1	0	3	4	9	3
Tuvalu	4	0	1	3	2	22	1

Group B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Solomon Is	4	4	0	0	21	1	12
Vanuatu	4	3	0	1	23	3	9
Samoa	4	2	0	2	9	8	6
Tonga	4	1	0	3	6	10	3
Amer. Samoa	4	0	0	4	1	38	0

Semi-finals

05.09.07 Solomon Is-New Caledonia 2-3
05.09.07 Fiji-Vanuatu 3-0

Third-place play-off

07.09.07 Solomon Is-Vanuatu 0-2

Final

07.09.07 New Caledonia-Fiji 1-0

**Tuvalu are not members of FIFA and could not enter the World Cup qualifying competition; they participated in the 1st stage tournament because it doubled as the South Pacific Games football competition.*

2nd stage

The four countries played in a single round-robin group. As group winners, New Zealand will meet the fifth-best Asian country in a two-leg tie for a place in the finals.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
New Zealand	6	5	0	1	14	5	15
New Caledonia	6	2	2	2	12	10	8
Fiji	6	2	1	3	8	11	7
Vanuatu	6	1	1	4	5	13	4

SOUTH AMERICA

4.5 finals berths

The 10 countries are playing in a single round-robin group. The top four will qualify for the finals. The fifth-placed country will meet the fourth-placed CONCACAF country in a two-leg tie for a place in the finals.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Paraguay	10	7	2	1	18	6	23
Brazil	10	4	5	1	15	4	17
Argentina	10	4	4	2	13	7	16
Chile	10	5	1	4	14	13	16
Uruguay	10	3	4	3	19	10	13
Ecuador	10	3	3	4	12	17	12
Colombia	10	2	5	3	4	8	11
Venezuela	10	3	1	6	12	18	10
Bolivia	10	2	3	5	13	22	9
Peru	10	1	4	5	5	20	7

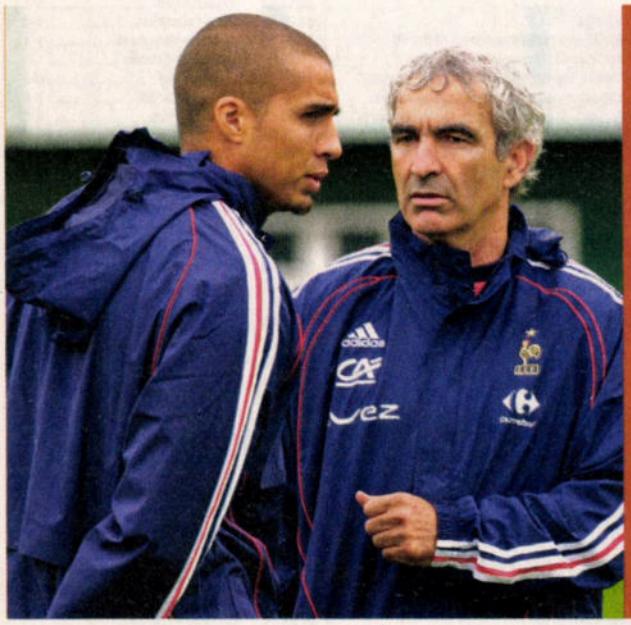
13.10.07 Argentina-Chile 2-0
13.10.07 Ecuador-Venezuela 0-1
13.10.07 Peru-Paraguay 0-0
13.10.07 Uruguay-Bolivia 5-0
14.10.07 Colombia-Brazil 0-0
16.10.07 Venezuela-Argentina 0-2
17.10.07 Bolivia-Colombia 0-0
17.10.07 Brazil-Ecuador 5-0
17.10.07 Chile-Peru 2-0
17.10.07 Paraguay-Uruguay 1-0
17.11.07 Argentina-Bolivia 3-0
17.11.07 Colombia-Venezuela 1-0
17.11.07 Paraguay-Ecuador 5-1
18.11.07 Peru-Brazil 1-1
18.11.07 Uruguay-Chile 2-2
20.11.07 Colombia-Argentina 2-1
20.11.07 Venezuela-Bolivia 5-3
21.11.07 Brazil-Uruguay 2-1
21.11.07 Chile-Paraguay 0-3
21.11.07 Ecuador-Peru 5-1
14.06.08 Peru-Colombia 1-1
14.06.08 Uruguay-Venezuela 1-1
15.06.08 Argentina-Ecuador 1-1
15.06.08 Bolivia-Chile 0-2
15.06.08 Paraguay-Brazil 2-0
17.06.08 Uruguay-Peru 6-0
18.06.08 Bolivia-Paraguay 4-2
18.06.08 Brazil-Argentina 0-0
18.06.08 Ecuador-Colombia 0-0
19.06.08 Venezuela-Chile 2-3
06.09.08 Argentina-Paraguay 1-1
06.09.08 Colombia-Uruguay 0-1
06.09.08 Ecuador-Bolivia 3-1
06.09.08 Peru-Venezuela 1-0
07.09.08 Chile-Brazil 0-3
09.09.08 Paraguay-Venezuela 2-0
10.09.08 Brazil-Bolivia 0-0
10.09.08 Chile-Colombia 4-0
10.09.08 Peru-Argentina 1-1
10.09.08 Uruguay-Ecuador 0-0
11.10.08 Argentina-Uruguay 2-1
11.10.08 Bolivia-Peru 3-0
11.10.08 Colombia-Paraguay 0-1
12.10.08 Ecuador-Chile 1-0
12.10.08 Venezuela-Brazil 0-4
14.10.08 Bolivia-Uruguay 2-2
15.10.08 Brazil-Colombia 0-0
15.10.08 Chile-Argentina 1-0
15.10.08 Paraguay-Peru 1-0
15.10.08 Venezuela-Ecuador 3-1
28.03.09 Argentina-Venezuela
28.03.09 Colombia-Bolivia
28.03.09 Uruguay-Paraguay
29.03.09 Ecuador-Brazil
29.03.09 Peru-Chile
31.03.09 Brazil-Peru
31.03.09 Venezuela-Colombia
01.04.09 Bolivia-Argentina
01.04.09 Chile-Uruguay
01.04.09 Ecuador-Paraguay
06.06.09 Argentina-Colombia
06.06.09 Bolivia-Venezuela
06.06.09 Paraguay-Chile
06.06.09 Peru-Ecuador
06.06.09 Uruguay-Brazil
10.06.09 Brazil-Paraguay
10.06.09 Chile-Bolivia
10.06.09 Colombia-Peru
10.06.09 Ecuador-Argentina
10.06.09 Venezuela-Uruguay
05.09.09 Argentina-Brazil
05.09.09 Chile-Venezuela
05.09.09 Colombia-Ecuador
05.09.09 Paraguay-Bolivia
05.09.09 Peru-Uruguay
09.09.09 Bolivia-Ecuador
09.09.09 Brazil-Chile
09.09.09 Paraguay-Argentina
09.09.09 Uruguay-Colombia
09.09.09 Venezuela-Peru
10.10.09 Argentina-Peru
10.10.09 Bolivia-Brazil
10.10.09 Colombia-Chile
10.10.09 Ecuador-Uruguay
10.10.09 Venezuela-Paraguay
14.10.09 Brazil-Venezuela
14.10.09 Chile-Ecuador
14.10.09 Paraguay-Colombia
14.10.09 Peru-Bolivia
14.10.09 Uruguay-Argentina

● *Finals draw: December 4, 2009*

● *Finals to be held in South Africa from June 11 to July 11, 2010*

Famous Last Words

Who said what and why



"Even with 60 million Frenchmen wanting him to go he's still there. The federation back Domenech – too bad for them"

David Trezeguet continues to harbour a grudge against *Les Bleus* coach Raymond Domenech for dropping him

"I wanted to express my support to those who are victims of a massacre"
Sevilla striker Frederic Kanoute controversially celebrates a goal against Deportivo by revealing a T-shirt with "Palestine" emblazoned on it

"He's five or six years older"
Player agent Miroslaw Skorupski claims ex-Poland World Cup striker Emmanuel Olisadebe has a false birth date in his passport

"To hear some people you would have thought I'd killed someone"
Lyon attacker Sidney Govou could have: he was caught drink-driving

"Put [Michael] Schumacher in a Minardi, he won't go anywhere"
QPR owner Flavio Briatore ridicules Manchester City's attempts to buy Kaka

"I don't think it is possible to see a worse Inter than the one we saw yesterday"
Inter president Massimo Moratti after the *Nerazzurri*'s shock 3-1 defeat away to Atalanta

"I've put a lot of effort into this job. Why should I resign? It's not in my character to resign and it would not help the team. It would simply be irresponsible"
Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon...two days before he resigned

"Referees aren't bought but they feel the spell of the big clubs. They make mistakes. Take Inter's goal against Siena: five players were offside"
Disgraced ex-Juventus general manager Luciano Moggi puts the case for his defence on an Italian TV talk show

"We're losing the mystique, each player's head is with his own team"
Former Argentina boss Alfio Basile laments the declining appeal of the international game

"I like Arsenal's style but I would have to make several corrections. You don't have to make 100,000 passes to score a goal"
Ivory Coast coach Vahid Halilhodzic says what many think: Arsenal over-elaborate

"I don't understand these rumours. I wouldn't have become the player I am today without the aid of Barca"
Lionel Messi rubbishes reports of Real Madrid president-in-waiting Florentino Perez luring him to the Bernabeu

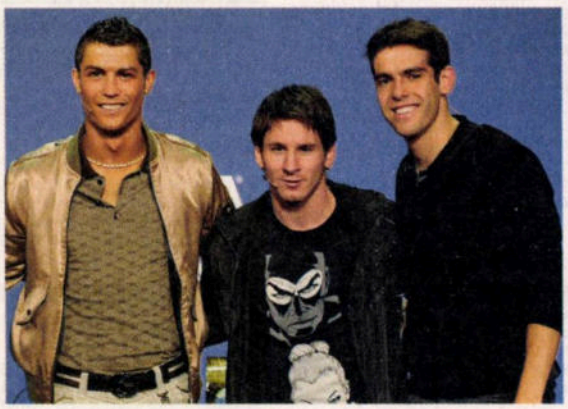
"He could bring in all three"
Ex-Milan boss Arrigo Sacchi tells a Spanish radio station that it is not out of the question for Perez to sign Messi, Kaka and Cristiano Ronaldo

"He told me there was no sense continuing to fight it"
Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge reveals the decision of France full-back Willy Sagnol to retire because of an incurable Achilles-tendon problem

Get stuck in...Davies takes on Arsenal

"A few of them let out a big scream, which is a bit embarrassing because it is a man's game"
Bolton's Kevin Davies explains what it's like to tackle an Arsenal player

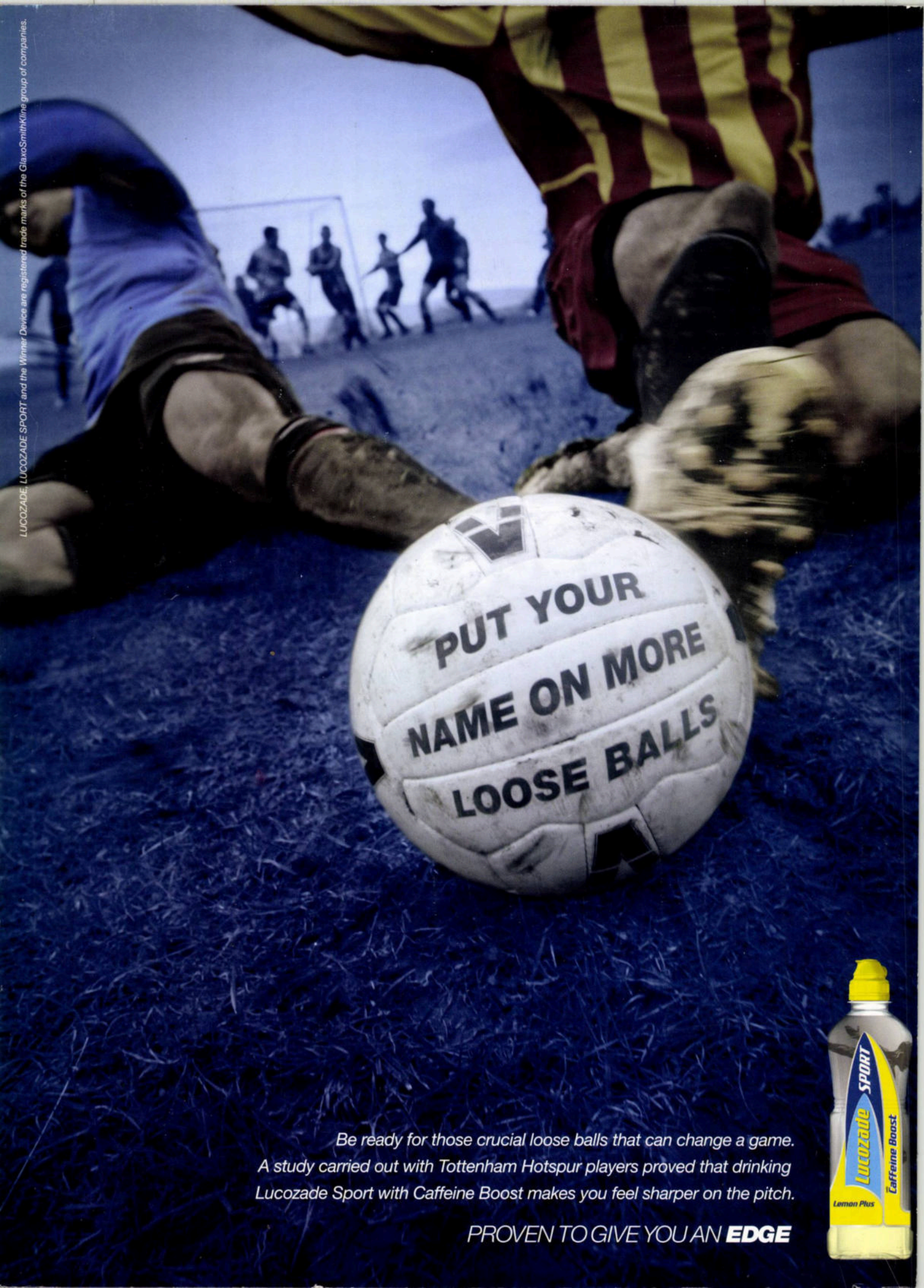
"We always have possession of the ball. It's the best team I've ever seen"
Eric Abidal bigs up his Barcelona team-mates



Perez's shopping list...Ronaldo, Messi and Kaka

NEXT MONTH APRIL ISSUE ON SALE MARCH 13

CLASSIC FOOTBALL SHIRTS.CO.UK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